天地無用！ 魎皇鬼

サルでもできる世界征服

長谷川菜穂子

イラスト 大和田直之

富士見ファンタジア文庫

Tenchi Muyo! Ryo-Ohki

Even a monkey can do world domination

By Naoko Hasegawa

Novel 7

Machine Translated and Edited by
Eff_Efferson
(March 2026)

For more: visit tenchimuyotranslationblog.blogspot.com

Prologue

The sound of a piano drifts toward the night sky.
Kagami looks up, listening to the occasional sand-laden wind howling against the door of the desolate bar, making a sound like a sudden rain shower before fading away.
Beyond the window frame, always gritty thanks to the sandstorms, the distant tower of the spaceport is visible. However, all that can be seen now is the warning light repeating its rhythmic blink.
The next ship won't arrive for another month.
Until then, the same customers will gather in this bar, the same sandstorms will howl, and the same stories will be told on repeat.
And I, too, will wear the same clothes and play this piano with my head bowed.
The piano... I call it that for convenience, but in this establishment, it’s as commonplace as a shot glass.
And yet, it is my only asset.
It was the one and only gift given to me by my father, whom I parted from before I turned twelve.
When I touch the keys, she trembles and sighs.
She screams like a wicked woman, stomps her feet, and then whispers sweet songs of love.
I only acquired these "tricks of the trade" after being cast off from my father’s ship.
Until then, I was like a novice monk. Precise rhythm and fingering were beaten into me with whips and reprimands. I was required to play every single note without error, as if reciting liturgy.
Yes, on my father’s ship, I was nothing more than a pathetic shadow.
At the feet of my great father—who stood tall like a literal ideal—I was the flawed shadow, clumsily wandering about.
Aside from piano lessons, my father rarely looked me in the eye.
Inside that vast ship, I was always alone.
The corridors were dim. Hundreds of libraries containing biological specimens and fragments of ruins stood silent, as if having swallowed eternal history, looking down on my existence as something not even worth a glance.
Wandering through that labyrinthine ship in an overwhelming silence, I was a mere pale, chubby child—a being with less value than the dust floating in the cosmos.
Having no other entertainment, I learned how to trick the food programs to over-supply me. I would sit on my bed, mind empty, stuffing food into my mouth.
The only places I didn't feel like a shadow were on my bed and—pardon the filth—the toilet.
I am alive. I am breathing. I taste, I swallow, I excrete.

Only during those moments did I feel my own warmth.
When my stomach was full, I would sleep wrapped in my own scent.
Food and my bed were the only "mothers" in that ruin of a ship who accepted my existence unconditionally.
I don't remember my real mother’s face.
I was told she abandoned me just after I was born and went elsewhere.
So, I had no choice but to create an ideal image of her by patching together women I had met.
Thus, my mother had the face of Lucie, the body of Merano, and the voice of Charis, the woman from the bar who looked after me.
Those who watched Galactic Network dramas around the same time as me might recognize those names. But that’s all they are. To them, Lucie and Merano are just celebrities.
To me, they are my mother.
I have raised this "mother" inside myself for a very long time.
And for just as long, I had no father.
I couldn't even imagine what a "father" was supposed to be.
But, just as a baby debuts in the world when the time is right, even a closed world eventually opens.
The monster known as "Father" appeared in my world exactly on my seventh birthday.
On that day, a man with silver hair tied back in a ponytail and wearing a long robe visited the bar before it opened.
I was playing with a crystal harp left behind by a customer.
It was an instrument whose tone changed subtly depending on where you held it and how you plucked it.
The man was talking to Charis, but he suddenly stopped, tilted his head, and looked at me.
His refined features and cold eyes captured me.
Suddenly terrified, I stopped playing and looked up at him with a frightened face.
"Continue," the man said. "Who taught you?"
I shook my head and began to back away slowly.
The man stared at me with deep interest.
I heard Charis start to say something like, "If you have any pity for this child..."
"Will you come to my ship?"
Ignoring her, the man approached with long strides.
I felt my body tremble with fear, but pinned by those cold eyes, I couldn't move.
"Lia’s son...? I am your father."
In that moment, I realized I was being permanently exiled from the paradise comprised of my mother Lia, the sandstorms, Charis's nagging, and serving drunkards.
The man who claimed to be my father handed Charis a significant sum of money and began walking away.

He didn't look back, nor did he check to see if I was following.
As if tied by an invisible chain, I followed him at a trot.
I knew I couldn't go back to Charis.
Because Charis had hugged me and said goodbye.
I feel like she said something else, too, but I don't remember.
A small craft of an unfamiliar model was docked at the spaceport.
I boarded as prompted and gazed blankly at the wide port.
When the man muttered something, the craft launched.
As we gained altitude and left the planet where I was born and raised, a massive ship—larger than anything I had ever seen—came into view, anchored in orbit.
"That is my ship. It’s too large to enter the port."
That was my first meeting with the man’s ship, the Souja.
"I shall teach you music. I am, for the moment, bored."
The man smiled for the first time.
Suddenly, I felt a dizziness as if a blinding light had shone upon me, and I pressed my back into the seat with my mouth agape.
My father was beautiful. His cold, clear eyes held unfathomable power and knowledge.
The god-like smile that had captivated my mother long ago.
I was only seven, and far more helpless than my mother had been.
"Father...?"
"Call me Professor."
The man placed his hand solemnly on my head.
"You resemble me."
"...Yes, Professor."
That was the first and last time I called him father.
The man’s hand moved, combing through my silver hair as if in blessing.
I fell into an ecstasy and became unable to speak.
"My son, from now on, you shall be known as Kagami."
It was only after I began living on the Souja and learned to read that I realized the name was taken from his own.
My father’s name was Kagato.

Chapter 1:

At the Masaki House...

A minor incident was unfolding at the Masaki household.
George—the faithful servant of the genius scientist Washu and the Masaki family butler—had delivered a terrifying prophecy.
"Tenchi-san, a moment..."
George stopped Tenchi in the middle of the hallway and lowered his voice.
"One month from today, on a Wednesday, a single star will fall from the sky. That star will involve its surroundings with demonic power and reign over this earth like a Great King of Terror. Of course, the Masaki house—our home—will also be swallowed by this fearsome star."
"Is... is that so?"
Tenchi asked back for the time being.
"That sounds serious... or rather..."
"It is serious," George nodded with a straight face. "To give you an idea of how serious: imagine that at dinner time, only Ryoko-san's plate is empty."
"Whaaat?!"
The moment a voice came from behind the wall, Ryoko's face appeared.
The way her head and shoulders emerged from the wall separating the living room and the hallway made her look like a taxidermy trophy.
"What do you mean, my portion is missing?!"
"Ryoko, that was just a figure of speech..."
"You think I'm stupid, don't you?"
Ryoko phased through the wall and pressed in on Tenchi.
"I don't think that at all."
Tenchi instinctively backed away and looked toward George, who was waiting politely.
"You just thought, 'She's a stupid, gluttonous, violent, quarrelsome, bottom-tier woman,' didn't you?"
"Ryoko, give it a rest."
Tenchi took another step back, praying she wouldn't keep picking a fight.
"You thought it, right?"
"I said I didn't!"
Tenchi couldn't grasp her true intent.
Ryoko took another step closer and whispered at the tip of his nose, like a confession of love:
"Just be honest and say you thought it."
"....."
"Say it! If you don't, I'll tickle you!"

"...I thought it."

The moment he said it, Tenchi realized he had fallen right into Ryoko’s trap. This was just a new game to her.

"But you still love me, right?" Ryoko grinned widely and wrapped her arms around Tenchi’s neck. "I’ll give you a special pardon—for the price of one kiss."

"Ryoko!!"

Ryoko planted a passionate kiss on Tenchi’s cheek, then phased through the wall in high spirits and vanished. Tenchi, flustered and blushing, peered toward the living room. Since a furious Ayeka hadn't come charging out, it seemed she hadn't overheard.

"So, as I was saying, it appears that demonic star is somehow connected to you, Tenchi-san. Does anything come to mind?"

"Eh? What was that?" George continued as if nothing had happened, making Tenchi do a double-take. "Something coming to mind... I mean, this is just a fortune-telling thing, right?"

"It is the 'Ultra-Super-Tornado Divination,' machine created by Washu-san by synthesizing every method of fortune-telling from all times and places."

"And let me guess, Sasami-chan told you that?"

"Princess Sasami did indeed say that."

"...I see." Tenchi felt he had heard everything he needed to hear. "I'll think about it. Tell Washu-san that. Honestly, I’d be even more grateful if you could just take over this 'destiny' for me instead."

"I shall convey the message. However, destiny is something that cannot be resolved unless you take it upon yourself." George gave a sincere smile, bowed, and retreated into Washu’s laboratory.

Left alone in the hallway, Tenchi thought blankly about the fate just declared. *Destiny comes knocking at the door suddenly.* Didn't the great Beethoven say something like that? The knock of fate is three short beats, followed by one long, decisive strike. The conductor coaxes ominous chords out of the orchestra like a whip to a horse. Those who listen tremble at the premonition, realizing a burning demonic star is waiting just outside the door.

Tenchi’s internal rendition of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony ran out of steam at the intro. Snapping back to reality, he sighed, realizing that surviving today was far more important than a "destiny" that may or may not arrive in a month.

"I wish George-san would give it a rest," he muttered. He’s not a bad guy, but... Tenchi felt a sudden thirst and headed into the kitchen. Thinking about it, being chased by an oni from a shrine, having a girl with a star on her head fall out of subspace, or being used as experimental material for the universe’s greatest genius were all far more terrifying fates than any prophecy.

Furthermore, once those "fates" arrived, they moved in and never left. *Is there any other man on Earth as occupied by his own destiny as I am?* Tenchi wondered as he pulled a bottle of mineral water from the fridge.

"Oops, sorry! I broke your glass this morning, Tenchi-nii-chan." A cheerful voice came from under the table, followed by a head of light-blue hair.

"Sasami-chan? What are you doing down there?"

"You are more than welcome to use mine." The Princess of Jurai, never losing her elegance even for a moment, crawled out from under the table. "There is plenty of time to drink water. Don't worry, please drink slowly."

Ayeka took her own cup, poured the water herself, and handed it to Tenchi.

"Ah... thanks." Noticing Ayeka watching him and the cup with a face full of expectation, Tenchi swallowed his questions along with the water.

"I shall take care of that cup now. It wouldn't do to have it break." Ayeka happily took the empty glass and crawled back under the table. "You come in here too, Lord Tenchi."

"Um... why?"

"Tenchi-nii-chan, it’s almost time!" Sasami beckoned from beside her sister. "They say a small earthquake is going to happen at 3:33:33 PM. So, since we knew you’d come to the kitchen for water, we decided to hide here together."

"An earthquake?!" Tenchi reflexively looked at the wall clock. The hands hit 3:33:30.

"Whoa—!"

The moment Tenchi scrambled under the table, a significant tremor rocked the Masaki house. The earthquake lasted exactly thirty seconds (Tenchi didn't take his eyes off the clock), and the moment it hit 3:34:04, it stopped dead.

"An earthquake... probably a magnitude 4."

"Ding-dong!" Sasami whispered happily. "It was a direct hit, right? Do you believe now?"

"Believe what...?"

"The prophecy."

Tenchi looked at Sasami's face, which seemed perfectly normal, and shook his head, feeling as though his vision was still shaking. Was this a coincidence, or a new game? Or was "Destiny" sending a signal?

Suddenly, without warning, every nerve in his body felt as if it had been electrocuted. In an instant, the sensation vanished without a trace. Before he could even wonder about it, he was pulled back to the reality in front of him.

"Sasami-chan..." He started to speak, but forgot what he was going to ask.

If they kept playing this "prophecy game," reality in the Masaki house would slowly drift away from the sane world. It would become an occult space governed by sorcery and omens.

"Who started this game? Washu-san?" Tenchi shifted his focus.

"Yeah... but she says it's not a game. Someone really is coming to see you, Tenchi-nii-chan. It's fate, and Washu-chan is just reading the messages from fate."

"How??" Tenchi asked, then felt like he had already put one foot in the grave of common sense. The defeat of logic, the victory of the occult.

"Whatever comes, Lord Tenchi will be fine, right?" Ayeka added with slightly misplaced confidence. "In our Jurai, we have astrology passed down from ancient times. Some people mock such things, but I believe there is extraordinary wisdom in the legacy of our ancestors. Even the horoscopes on TV or in magazines are often right, aren't they? Being a genius, Washu-san knows the truth of these matters well."

"I don't really get it either," Sasami admitted. Whether it was a game or for real didn't seem to matter much to her. "Washu-chan told me to bring her the toolbox because the TV was going to break soon. And then it really did break! She fixed it in no time. So I asked her: if you knew, why didn't you fix it *before* it broke?"

"And?"

"She said she’s currently tracing singularities back from a specific result, so she can't eliminate the singularity itself. She said she’s 'going backward up the tree.' I didn't understand at all, but I thought it was amazing!"

"Hmph..." Tenchi felt it was better not to have asked, but he nodded as if he understood because Sasami was so earnest.

"But Tenchi-nii-chan, who exactly is coming? You didn't make some girl cry, did you? I mean, even if you didn't mean anything by it, maybe she took it to heart..."

She said something terrifyingly perceptive for her age.

"...Probably not. Because you're Tenchi-nii-chan, after all," Sasami muttered to herself. "I hope it’s not another lady visitor; things get so complicated."

"Yeah." Tenchi agreed completely, but something still felt "off."

"Tenchi-nii-chan, what *is* destiny?"

Just as he was about to say that he wouldn't be struggling so much if he knew the answer—

"What are you guys doing under the table?"

Ryoko, who had apparently been somewhere else until now, peered in. "You were talking bad about me, weren't you?"

"N-No, we weren't."

"Liar! You were saying: 'Ryoko has a nice body, she’s the strongest in the universe, a multi-talented idol, and invincible!'"

"Ryoko-san, how is any of that 'talking bad'?!" Ayeka snapped, and Tenchi was finally released as the target of the new game.

"You said it, right?"

"As if anyone would say that!"

Tenchi crawled out the other side. "See you later, Sasami-chan," he whispered.

"Just say you said it and I'll forgive you!"

"I told you I didn't!"

Tenchi ran off without looking back.

"Ah, Tenchi!" "Lord Tenchi!?"

In that moment, a question flashed through Tenchi's mind: *What kind of destiny could possibly be more terrifying than this?*

"How strange... Even though the singularity is this clear, I can't see the identity of the destiny itself."

In her lab, Washu tilted her head in front of a program that had calculated the singularity with zero margin of error. "I know someone is falling down to us. But I don't know *who*, and it's getting annoying. I hope it's not some clumsy criminal falling into our laps."

There was a knock. "Come in, it's open."

"Washu-san, sorry to bother you."

"Oh, Lord Tenchi?" Washu finally turned around. "Well, matters belonging to the future have too many variables. This is as much as I know for now. Sorry to get your hopes up."

"I wasn't exactly 'hoping'..." Tenchi muttered, his momentum blunted. "If possible, I'd like you to stop with the occult stuff."

"Occult? Yeah, I guess you could call it that. But Lord Tenchi, from the perspective of you Earthlings, this universe is basically made of the occult and synchronicity. You only realize 'Oh, so that's what it was' after comparing two events. Well, I won't ask you to agree, so don't worry."

Washu stood up and flicked the screen. A nebula Tenchi had never seen before appeared.

"This nebula was just born. And this," the screen split to show a pale plant with a crown like pink cotton candy, "is a plant I'm keeping in the lab. These two were born at the same moment. One lives for billions of years, the other for about a week, but in terms of their internal time, they live the same 'amount' of time. The universe is tightly connected by an invisible network."

Washu flicked her finger again, and the screen went dark.

"Why not just wait and see? Lord Tenchi, you are a man who attracts all sorts of fates. If you think about it, you're blessed—you don't even have to go out and look for destiny; it comes looking for you. A 'high-density' life, shall we say?

Actually, your planet has something similar. On a summer night, if you leave it on all night, they come one after another..."

"Are you talking about a bug zapper?!" Tenchi felt like he'd gained three white hairs in the last hour.

"Yes, exactly. Lord Tenchi, I shall call you the 'Bug Zapper of Life.'" Washu narrowed her fathomless green eyes playfully. "Many people will come just to see a glimpse of your light. Even stars passing through the sky are charmed by your light and fall to earth... My, my, Washu-chan is a poet."

Washu cradled her cheeks in her hands and tilted her head. "Ah, maybe that was a bit embarrassing."

"The rising sun is beautiful, holding light in its arms. The moon's smile is beautiful at night, but more beautiful still is your... excuse me, this was a song dedicated to a lady."

George had entered at some point. Seeing Tenchi, he gave a quiet nod.

"I just remembered I have something to do." Tenchi backed away slowly, feeling for the door behind him. If he stayed any longer, there was no telling what kind of lecture he'd be subjected to. "Well then, Washu-san."

Tenchi slipped through the door and fled the lab. For a week after that, he didn't go near the place. But even during that time, the wheel of fortune continued to turn slowly, sending mysterious signals to the Bug Zapper of Life.

Chapter 2:

Kagami was on a Cargo Ship...

Kagami was peeling potatoes in the kitchen of a cargo ship. As to why there were potatoes on a regular interstellar cargo ship—well, there just were. Since ancient times, it's been the rule that stowaways lucky enough not to be fed to the sharks end up working in the hold. And there is no ship that doesn't carry rats and potatoes. Thus, Kagami was battling a mountain of potatoes, his delicate fingers covered in nicks.

"Hey, kid!" the head chef barked. "Why do you want to go to such a backwater planet now?"

"I believe I've told you many times." Kagami stopped, brushed back his silver hair, and looked at the man twice his size.

"Revenge for your old man, right? No offense, but you don't look like the type for a vendetta. Besides, that Kagato incident was ages ago. Wanting revenge now, I mean... really?"

"I had no money," Kagami muttered flatly, as if talking about someone else. "I thought I'd save up and buy a ship, but I have no credit, so I couldn't get a loan. I bought lottery tickets and tried contests, but they failed. I figured if I worked a regular job, I'd never leave the planet, so I took a gamble and slipped onto your cargo ship."

"Talk about a nuisance." The chef tossed a potato into a pot. "Usually, stowaways get tossed out the airlock. You're lucky our captain is a softie, but what if he wasn't? Your life would've ended right there. And seriously, does someone on a quest for revenge worry about savings and loans? Most guys like that would've boosted a cruiser and been outside patrol space by now."

"I'm completely hopeless with machinery. I don't have a license, either." Kagami added a finished potato to an artistically stacked pyramid.

"What a pathetic guy for these times. No strength, no money, can't use a gun, can't even peel a potato right. Tell me, is there *anything* else you can do?"

"I can play the piano," Kagami replied, again with that detached tone. "From vocal accompaniment to solos, I can handle it all. I am, originally, a piano player."

"Oh? A piano player?" The chef turned around. "A piano player... you mean, like a musician?"

"I wouldn't go as far as 'musician,' but..."

"Hmm..." The chef furrowed his brows and stared intensely at Kagami before suddenly snatching the knife from his hand. "No, no! If you keep doing this, you'll ruin your tools! Our captain loves singing. Go wash your hands and change! This will get you out of living in the cargo hold."

"Eh?" A silver lock of hair swayed over Kagami's handsome face.

"Hurry up! You've gotta sell yourself!"

Kagami scrambled out of the kitchen. Within the day, he had been granted a private room. For the next month, he was prized as the captain's live karaoke machine every night. At ports of call, he was treated to free drinks. After a

graceful voyage with three meals a day and naps included, Kagami left the cargo ship with a parting gift.

"You could've just stayed on the ship and forgotten about revenge," the captain said, tearing up at the farewell. "Your piano... it was so beautiful!"

"I cannot thank you enough for your kindness," Kagami bowed politely. "But I have already made a vow in my heart."

"Come back anytime. I'll make you potato soup again," the chef said, finding it hard to let go of Kagami's hand.

"Thank you. I would have been lost without you, Chef."

"Don't you go messing with the autopilot I set," the mechanic he'd befriended yelled. "If you just sit tight, you should arrive at that 'Okayama' place. When you come back, I'll give you real lessons."

"Thank you for everything." Kagami bowed deeply. "Well then, I'm off."

Seen off by the entire cargo ship crew, Kagami boarded a small cruiser—a parting gift from the captain. Launching from a point near Mars, the cruiser shrank toward the blue planet in the blink of an eye.

"He was a beautiful young man," the captain sighed. "I should've made a move on him."

"He's too serious; you would've broken him," the chef sighed. "Hard to believe he's the son of a legendary criminal. He's way too nice."

"Why does a guy who plays the piano that well and looks that good have to go on a quest for revenge?" the mechanic sighed.

"He was born under those stars. I'm a sailor; I know the omens of the stars well."

"I wonder which star did the damage..."

The three sighed in unison.

"O Goddess Tsunami, protector of all sailors, please protect that young man."

The captain, the chef, and the mechanic looked up at the cosmos and offered a prayer. Receiving their prayer, the blue planet twinkled as if waking up.

Inside the cruiser, Kagami gazed at the blue planet, which sparkled like a smiling jewel. "I’ve finally come this far..."

Images from a network news broadcast he had seen exactly a year ago cut back into his mind. The video had been choppy due to a sandstorm, and the audio surged like waves, but he remembered the face that appeared for a split second with crystalline clarity.

'**Kagato is Dead!!**'

Following the full-screen text, images of his god-like father, Kagato. The nostalgic majesty of the *Souja*. And then—the face of a round-faced boy with an expression that could only be called "vacant."

"Tenchi... was it?"

The footage had been sent to the Galaxy Police via Ansible from Okayama, Japan, shortly before the Kagato Incident, though Kagami had no way of knowing that.

"There is no way a boy like this could have defeated my father!"

Kagami remembered the night he first saw it. As usual, the sandstorm howled, the same faces drank the same liquor, and they shared the same jokes. The news bulletin played on the receiver left on in the corner of the bar. Kagami usually ignored the news, but the name announced by the anchor made him turn around.

Kagato is dead! Kagato is dead! Kagato is dead!!

When he snapped out of it, Charis was beside him, silently watching the news. "...How awful." She reached to change the channel, then paused. "He’s alive. They’re just making a fuss. He obviously escaped."

Unfortunately, I heard nothing. Or perhaps the meaning simply didn't register.

"I’m changing the channel. Did you hear me? I’m changing it." Before I could reply, Charis quickly switched the channel. "Come on, don't slack off. Work, work!" Despite her words, she gently put her arm around my shoulder, guided me back to the piano, and placed my hands on the keys.

I began to play a standard love ballad. The customers began to talk, looking relieved. I played another ballad, then an up-tempo song, then a waltz. The customers began to make a ruckus, no longer paying me any mind.

"It’s a lie..."

I played a stormy etude. I played a nocturne that felt like drifting at the bottom of the sea. My fingers ran across the keys of their own accord, shouting songs of love. Suddenly, a two-part invention surfaced in my mind and slipped out into the bar through my fingertips. Two parts became three, then four, five, and finally a complex six-part counterpoint. Harmonic progressions intertwined like steel wires, themes calling to each other in turns, variations, and a beautiful, mathematical law that controlled every corner of the musical tapestry.

When I finished playing a seven-part fugue, the bar was dead silent. The customers stared at me with their mouths open. Sweat dripped from my fingers.

"We’re closing up for today." Charis’s voice sounded like that of an old woman who had aged all at once. "Go home. Come back tomorrow."

See ya. Take care. We’ll wait for you tomorrow.

Charis forced a smile, saw the customers out, and waved. When the last customer had left, Charis cried.

"It’s okay, Kagami. Don't play anymore."

I stood up and stepped forward to apologize to Charis. Suddenly, my vision shook and tilted violently. When I came to, I was on a sofa. Shortly before dawn, I left the bar while Charis was sleeping. I never went back. I buried my own boyhood and the piano under a grave.

Since then, I have had no place to belong. I wandered the town carrying the phantom memorial photo of a father I didn't even know was dead, taking any job I could get. I didn't even care what I was doing or what I was trying to do.

One day, three months after leaving the bar, I was in another bar in another town. When a piano player who looked a lot like me came out from the back, I almost kicked my chair over to leave. I didn't think I could stand to hear the sound of a piano. During my moment of hesitation, a melody slipped from his fingers. It was a standard love ballad I had played countless times. The sound of the piano flowed through the bar, warm and gentle, and I realized he was nothing like me.

He has something. He has this bar, this town, this planet, and he has something I don't know. I have nothing. I have hands, feet, and fingers, but there is nothing inside. I am living without purpose. There is only one freshly mounded grave inside me, and there is no epitaph to be carved upon it.

No...

"...That’s not right," I muttered.

I hadn't even held a memorial for my father. I had walked around with his photo in my heart while trying not to think of anything. My father would surely despise me. Just as I had failed to become a genius like him after seven years of training, I have accomplished nothing. I am not even worth the dust of a grave. My job is not to sit here like this. My job is...

Kagami suddenly snapped back to his senses. The size of the blue planet didn't seem to have changed much.

"I am going there to hold a memorial for my father." As he muttered this, he felt the distance between himself and his father shrink slightly. "I will defeat the boy who is said to have defeated my father with my own hands."

He felt the memorial photo in his heart smile slightly. *Ho... Kagami, can you do it?* the smile seemed to ask.

"I can do it, Professor," Kagami whispered to encourage himself. "When I accomplish this, will you say it to me?"

Well done, my son. I am proud of you. You should be proud of my blood as well. You are the only son who inherits the name of your father, Kagato...

"Hehe..." Kagami smiled for the first time. Really? Is it true, Professor? You’ll love me?

The photo in his heart remained smiling and gave no answer.

Chapter 3:

One Month Since the Prophecy

One month since the prophecy—the day the countdown hit zero. The Masaki house was enveloped in a strange silence. Although the kitchen clock was nearing 11:00 AM, no one had come down yet. Even for a Sunday, this was a bit too late. This was the fated day when a terrible calamity was supposed to fall; perhaps everyone had evacuated to the hot springs.

A faint scratching sound came from the kitchen floor. "Myan?"

The source of the sound looked up at the sink far above, gathered strength, and jumped with a magnificent spring. "Myan??"

It seemed the search on the sink was unsuccessful. The small creature looked around the kitchen and tilted its head. Then, tears welled up in its large yellow eyes. "Myamya-myan!"

The creature listened intently, waiting for a reaction. The Masaki house was silent. "MYAAAAAAAAN!!"

The brown-furred body leaped and dashed through the hallway. "MYAAAAAN!! MYAAAAAN!!" It cried out like an emergency alarm in front of the Jurai sisters' room.

"...What is it, Ryo-chan? Are you hungry?" Its small master opened the door, rubbing her eyes. Ryo-Ohki, usually the smallest creature in the house, jumped onto Sasami’s shoulder in relief. "Myan?" It licked Sasami’s sleepy cheek as if prompting her.

"Sorry, sorry, I overslept. I’ll give you a carrot now."

"Myan! ♡"

Then, Ayeka emerged from the room, groggily waking up. "What’s wrong? So early in the morning."

Sasami saw her sister’s sleepy face and looked at the alarm clock by the bed. "It’s not early, Big Sister. It’s past eleven."

"My...! It’s Ryoko’s fault," Ayeka muttered grumpily, still half-asleep. "I kept saying we should go home, but she kept saying 'one more hour, one more hour'..."

"Then Kiyone-onee-chan and Mihoshi-onee-chan are still sleeping too." Sasami felt a bit cheated for being the first one up. "Tenchi-nii-chan, Father, and Ryoko-onee-chan too. Only Ryo-chan, who didn't go to karaoke, woke up early and was waiting all this time."

"Poor thing," Ayeka replied with a huge yawn. "That aside, I’m hungry."

"MYAN!!" Ryo-Ohki agreed with all its might.

"Then help me, Big Sister. If we make food, I’m sure everyone will wake up."

"Cooking first thing in the morning... how depressing."

"Fine, then you don't have to eat." Sasami pouted, so Ayeka raised the white flag and gracefully descended the stairs.

"Here, Ryo-chan, it’s a carrot! ♡" As Sasami was using a carrot to "fish" for Ryo-Ohki in the kitchen, the doorbell rang. *Ding-dong!*

"Who could it be? This early in the morning." For the sleep-deprived Ayeka, it still felt like dawn. "Lord Tenchi... is still resting. Someone..." She peered into the Japanese-style room, where Mihoshi, Kiyone, and Ryoko were sleeping tangled together like a puzzle. "Such sleepyheads!"

Ignoring her own lateness, Ayeka grumbled as she quickly smoothed her hair, threw a housecoat over her white nightgown, and went to the front door. "Who is it?"

When she opened the door, a beautiful man she had never seen before was standing there. Flowing silver hair fell across his shoulders, and he looked down at Ayeka with a serious expression on his refined face.

"And you are...?" Ayeka gasped. He was wearing a white pilot suit with black lines, like something a spaceship crew would wear. This clothing, this hair, and these eyes—he was clearly not an Earthling.

"And you?" The man also seemed surprised. "I’ve come to see a boy named Tenchi." His golden eyes narrowed suspiciously.

Ayeka’s heart pounded. *What a beautiful gentleman... such delicate features... but there’s something ominous about this face...*

"Kagato!!" Ayeka jumped back. "Are you... Kagato's ghost!?"

"Ghost!?" The man jumped back in surprise as well. "Does my father's spirit appear here?"

"Father!?" Ayeka's head spun. "If he's your father, then you're Kagato's son?" It was a conversation that sounded like there were two Mihoshis, but both were perfectly serious.

"Wait! Do not move!" Ayeka reflexively struck a pose. A pillar-like barrier surrounded the man. "What have you come here for? Do you have business with Lord Tenchi? Let me make this clear: if you're thinking of revenge, that is a misplaced grudge! If you have nothing to hide, state your name!"

The man looked around, bewildered by Ayeka's intensity. He looked as if he were searching for someone to save him from this predicament. Ayeka furrowed her brows and narrowed the barrier.

"Release this barrier! Let me see the boy named Tenchi!" the man finally cried out in desperation.

"I will not! What will you do if you see him? We can talk while you're inside the barrier."

"I am Kagami. I am not a suspicious person. I only want to hear about my father!"

What a pathetic development... Kagami thought, but he couldn't move.

The commotion woke Tenchi on the second floor, as well as Ryoko and Kiyone in the Japanese-style room. Sasami had long since been peeking out from the kitchen at the stranger. The only happy souls still in dreamland were Mihoshi and Nobuyuki.

"Ayeka-san, what on earth happened?" Tenchi came down the stairs, rubbing his messy hair, and his eyes went wide at the entrance. "W-Who are you?"

"Are you the boy named Tenchi?" Kagami asked angrily, finding himself forced to speak from inside a barrier just as Ayeka had intended. "I am Kagami. Come closer and let me see your face. Tell this person to release the barrier!"

The moment Tenchi saw the man's face, an unidentifiable chill ran through him. The opening phrase of "Destiny" refrained in his mind, and he was stunned to realize today was the day. *Is this the true identity of the demonic star or destiny?* Well... it's no wonder they mistook him for Kagato.

Tenchi cautiously approached. The man named Kagami resembled Kagato closely—the silver hair, the golden eyes, the refined features.

"I've come from a distant star to find you. Is this your answer? Are you trained to capture and interrogate any unknown visitor?"

"Ayeka-san, please release the barrier." Tenchi gave Ayeka a look, thinking things had become incredibly complicated.

Once the barrier was gone, Kagami looked around with furrowed brows. "Do you live with this many women?"

Tenchi reflexively looked back to see Ryoko, Sasami, and Kiyone peeking out with intense curiosity. "Sorry," he apologized reflexively, then realized he had no reason to apologize. "It was so sudden, I think Ayeka-san was just surprised. So, what is your business..."

"Is it true that you killed my father?" Kagami interrupted impatiently. "Is my father dead?"

Tenchi was bewildered by the unexpected question. "Did you really do it?"

"What's your deal, you!?" Ryoko cut in with angry eyes. "What do you think you're doing, bringing up something from so long ago!? Showing up now to dig up something the whole galaxy knows. Haven't you seen the news or the databases?"

"I've researched to some extent. That's why I could come here," Kagami maintained his serious expression. "But that's not what I want to know. I came to see with my own eyes whether you really defeated my father. How did you defeat that great man? You look like nothing but a child; is there something within you that surpasses my father?"

"How... I mean..." Tenchi stammered. *That... how should I put it? I would've died if Tsunami hadn't helped me... and what happened after that isn't something I can explain with words.* "It's true that I fought Kagato and defeated him. But if you ask me if he's truly dead, I don't know. I don't clearly understand my own power, and Kagato... he vanished at the end."

"Vanished? Vanished, you say? What does that mean?"

"You're an annoying brat. Kagato is dead. He said it was my loss, didn't he? This guy swung the Light Hawk Sword and cut Kagato in half," Ryoko chimed in mockingly.

"Light Hawk Sword!?"

"You really are a country bumpkin. The Light Hawk Sword is the strongest technique in the universe, only usable by a Prince of Jurai. Since he hacked him up with that, he’s obviously dead."

"A Prince of Jurai..." Kagami turned pale. He stared intensely at Tenchi’s face, then suddenly his shoulders slumped and he pressed his hand to his temple. "How can this be... such a child... Professor, I’ve come all this way... what am I supposed to do?" Kagami covered his face, looking as if he were about to burst into sobs.

"What should we do, Ryoko...?" Tenchi turned to Ryoko for help.

"Just leave him? He came here on his own and got depressed on his own." Ryoko replied coldly. "Waking me up from a nice sleep for some pointless business. Hey, you depressed brat—if you’re done, hurry up and go home!"

"It’s cruel to say it like that." Unexpectedly, Ayeka spoke up. "This person... he doesn't seem like a bad man. It’s wrong to hate him just because he’s Kagato’s son."

"What’s gotten into you!?" Ryoko looked at her in disbelief. "You were the one bullying him with the barrier earlier!"

"I was, but... I didn't listen to him properly..." Ayeka looked down guiltily and stole a glance at Kagami. "Lord Tenchi, please do something for him."

Kagami looked up. His determined expression possessed a tragic beauty that could strike a woman’s heart. "Even so, I must do it. If you defeated my father, then I will... defeat YOU!!"

A blade of light extended from the hilt of a light-saber in Kagami’s hand.

"Eh!?"

"Father’s enemy, prepare yourself!!" Kagami swung the saber back and charged at Tenchi.

"Wait a second..." Tenchi lightly dodged, and Ayeka backed away with a scream.

"I beg you! Let me avenge my father!" Kagami turned and charged again, swinging the saber wildly.

Let me avenge him... that’s... This guy... he’s unbelievably bad at this!? Tenchi dodged the blade with certainty, thinking of a way to make him sheath the sword without being too rough.

"Light Hawk Sword!" A sword of light appeared in Tenchi’s hand. "Ryoko, Ayeka-san, don't interfere."

Tenchi’s gaze changed. A glowing emblem appeared on his forehead. "Stop this foolishness!"

With the first strike, he knocked the light-saber upward, stepped inside Kagami’s guard, and swept his leg. By the time Kagami realized it, the Light Hawk Sword was at his throat and his dominant hand was pinned.

"Don't waste your life after coming all this way."

"Oooooh~~!" Ryoko applauded loudly. "Tenchi, you’ve gotten pretty cool, haven't you?"

"You...!?" Kagami’s eyes were wide with disbelief, but he bit his lip and turned his face away. "It’s my loss. Do with me as you wish."

"Then, please stand up." Tenchi smiled, vanished the sword, and offered his hand. "Revenge is pointless, isn't it? I didn't fight Kagato because I hated him. There were circumstances and I had no choice. I don't think Kagato hated me, either. We fought with our lives on the line, and the matter is settled. There’s no need for you to be dragged into it, is there?"

"You..." Kagami didn't take Tenchi’s hand, but stood up slowly. *Strong... too strong... this boy truly did defeat my father.* Kagami was so shocked he could barely stand. The boy must have seen through the fact that this was his first time swinging a sword. And he had made him realize it in the most efficient way possible. In this state, he hadn't even used a fraction of his power. And yet...

"My apologies... Lord Tenchi." Kagami’s face was almost ghostly pale. "It seems I was mistaken. I offer my apologies to the ladies as well. Please forget about me."

Kagami turned his back to Tenchi and began to walk away with slumped shoulders.

"Hey, wait a second!" A loud, gravelly voice came from the second-floor window. "You there! There’s no shame in being bad with a sword. Why don't you train with my son?"

Kagami almost tripped.

"Father!?" Tenchi looked up in shock to see Nobuyuki waving with a grin from the second floor.

"It’s fun here with all the girls around~! Come visit again~!"

Kagami stared blankly at the window, then turned away without a word and began to stagger off.

"Beautiful boy, I’ll be waiting with my video camera next time~!"

"Father, stop it!" Tenchi had forgotten the existence of the most irrational pillar of the Masaki household.

"What is everyone doing up so early~~?" Mihoshi appeared, rubbing her sleepy eyes. "I feel like that person walking over there looks exactly like Kagato~~."

The second most irrational person in the Masaki house waved broadly at Kagami. "Hey, hey, look over here for a second~~!"

"Are you an idiot!?" Ryoko struck Mihoshi in Kiyone’s stead, making her tear up.

"That hurts~~!"

And so, the "Demon Star" that had fallen upon the Masaki household was repelled—for the time being. But, however...

"Master, what on earth went wrong?" George, who had been observing the entire scene from the screen instead of heading to the entrance, turned around. "Why is that beautiful young man considered a 'Demon Star'?"

"Hmmmmm..." Washu remained glaring at the screen, her thoughts racing. "He’s weak—unbelievably weak. On top of that, he seems serious and timid. I can’t believe he’s the son of that Kagato. There must be some hidden reason for this..."

Washu suddenly stood up. "Where are those Spy-Eyes I made the other day?"

"The fly-type or the cockroach-type?" George replied accurately, without a hint of fluster. This was exactly why he was such a capable secretary.

"The fly-type. Set it and have it pursue him."

"Understood." George left the lab. A short while later, a fly slightly larger than normal flew out of the Masaki house at incredible speed.

Chapter 4:

Now, Leaving the Masaki House...

After leaving the Masaki residence, Kagami walked unsteadily down the road. Naturally, he had no idea where he was going.

His cruiser was hidden in the forest near the Masaki Shrine, but he had a feeling something had gone wrong during the landing. The reason was simple: it wouldn't restart. Since Kagami was a complete klutz when it came to mechanics, there was nothing he could do except cover it with dead branches and grass to keep it out of sight.

"What am I supposed to do now?" Kagami muttered, sounding like a tragic protagonist in a literary novel.

In reality, the only thing he had learned from his first attempt was the cold, hard fact that seeking revenge was out of the question. As he replayed the recent events in his mind over and over, he felt like he wanted to find a hole and crawl into it.

"A Prince of Jurai... what an incredible boy." Kagami knew nothing of the pathetic Tenchi who was constantly chased around by Ryoko and Ayeka. In his mind, Tenchi was a peerless hero: calm, brilliant, wielding the galaxy's strongest technique—the Light Hawk Sword—yet refusing to kill needlessly. Thinking about this "invincible hero" only made Kagami more depressed.

"What did I even come here for?" An inner voice whispered that what he *should* do was somehow fix the cruiser and leave immediately. Yes, he would tuck his tail between his legs and go home.

A man who had come from the far reaches of the galaxy for revenge, only to lose in less than three seconds. Rather than continue to disgrace himself, he felt it would be better to return to being a piano player on a cargo ship.

Truth be told... Kagami thought frantically, *I can't do anything properly except play the piano.* When he was a child, he was just a fat kid with no talent. Because he was a mechanical klutz, he could only get simple manual labor jobs, and since he didn't really go to school, he couldn't even do basic math. He possessed none of the myriad abilities his father had.

Teleportation, diverse combat skills, a genius intellect capable of creating the Twin Snakes, a resilient spirit in pursuit of truth... if he had even one of those, his life surely would have been different. The only thing he inherited from his father was his appearance.

Flowing silver hair, golden eyes, a well-proportioned tall frame, and refined beauty. All of these were completely useless for revenge. Kagami didn't even like his own face. He felt that the more he looked like his father, the more the differences between them stood out.

His father’s eyes held a bottomless intelligence. His thin, set lips reflected a willpower that disciplined itself to a stoic degree. His dignified bearing exuded an overwhelming self-confidence. Kagami was certain that it must have been some kind of mistake that his father—who never did anything wasteful—had picked up someone like him and looked after him.

But even that father had fallen before the galaxy's strongest Light Hawk Sword. To seek revenge against such an opponent was beyond arrogance; it was the height of madness.

"I shouldn't have come..." Kagami felt it would have been better if he had died earlier. For the first time, he experienced the feeling of an enemy showing him mercy, and he felt he had touched the true essence of revenge. Namely: *The way of the vendetta is found in death.*

He knew nothing of the *Hagakure*, but that was how he felt. Even if you couldn't defeat your opponent, dying would save your honor. The enemy would never forget the expression of regret on the face of the one they struck down until the day they died. Of course, it’s better to win, but dying at least drives a sliver of resentment deep into the enemy's heart. If defeating them was impossible, he at least wanted that. To be shown mercy and forgiven—that was the end of everything.

Wandering with these thoughts, Kagami arrived at an unfamiliar town as dusk approached. After walking for nearly half a day, he had coincidentally stumbled into a town with the same name as his father’s ship.

Standing on that street corner, he suddenly realized he knew absolutely nothing about this planet. This was the price of thinking only about revenge and never about what would happen after he lost. To be precise, it wasn't even that he had only thought about revenge. He had held an unfounded conviction that as long as he got here, things would somehow work out.

"Where am I?!" Thanks to the Galaxy Academy's super-technology, he had no trouble with the language, but he couldn't read Japanese. With a worried expression, Kagami began walking through the busy shopping district.

Under the gaze of the passersby—Earthlings, essentially—Kagami felt an urge to vanish. Walking around like this, he would surely get wrapped up in trouble sooner or later and end up having an unpleasant experience. Trouble aside, his life might even be in danger. There were "thugs" on every planet, and Kagami had suffered many such misfortunes in the past.

"I should have stayed at the cruiser..." Kagami muttered in half-despair, but his legs were starting to give out. Both physically and mentally, he was no different from an Earthling; he was utterly exhausted and on the verge of collapsing.

Then, at the edge of his fading vision, something familiar appeared. He stopped in his tracks. Through the large show window of a musical instrument store, something he knew better than anything else gave off a dull glow.

"A piano..."

Kagami drifted toward the store door. The automatic door opened, and like a moth drawn to a flame, he stepped inside.

"This is a dream... a dream within a dream." Before he could think, his left hand pulled out the bench, and his fingers touched the keys. In the next moment, a song of love, like a fleeting light, began to flow through the store. The scattered customers and staff all turned around, but Kagami didn't notice. He continued to play, and the melody, sounding like a prayer, pierced through the glass window and captured the souls of two young people who happened to be passing by.

"What a beautiful sound..." A young man dressed in street fashion and Nike sneakers muttered involuntarily, grabbing his companion's arm.

"What is it, Shinobu?" The young woman, dressed in Shibuya-style fashion with boots, looked into the show window and was instantly transfixed. "What a beautiful man..."

The two of them pressed their noses against the glass, listening to the wondrous melody with faces that looked as if their souls had been snatched away. Kagami played on in a state of ecstasy. When he finished the final phrase with an improvised chorale, his head slumped forward as if his very life force had been spent.

"Sir?!" A clerk rushed over a moment later. "What's wrong? Are you alright?"

Kagami’s shoulders gave a small start, and he slowly raised his face. His golden eyes looked like shards of glass washed by eternal waves, having lost even their memories.

"I'm sorry..." The voice he finally squeezed out was a raspy, jarring sound. "...It's not even my piano."

Kagami stood up shakily and stumbled out of the shop. *I can't stay here any longer...* The moment he thought that, a sudden burst of clapping rang out.

"That was amazing! You're really something, man!" The man called Shinobu ran up to him, his face flushed with excitement. "Where are you from? Are you a musician?"

The woman gazed at him with entranced eyes. "Hey, hey, want to go for tea? We don't have much money, but..."

"Are you talking to me?" Kagami asked back, not quite grasping their words.

"Is that hair real? Are those special contacts? What band are you in? What's your name? I'm totally into you already!"

"Don't ask him everything at once!" Shinobu hurriedly pulled the girl’s sleeve and gave a small, apologetic bow. "Sorry about her, she’s just like this. I'm Shinobu Tazunemori. This is Nanako Sewa. Um, would you really like to go for some tea?"

"Tea?" Kagami asked blankly. "Is it not a tavern? Is there no food?"

"No way! Are you hungry, mister?" Nanako burst out laughing. "Then it’s McD's or Mos Burger. Let's go, quick!"

Before he knew it, Kagami was caught by the two of them. They rounded a few corners and led him into a strangely gaudy shop.

"Three value sets. Cokes, size M." Settling into McDonald's, the two of them sat in the smoking section, puffing away on cigarettes while watching with amusement as the beautiful man in front of them devoured a hamburger without saying a word.

"Did you skip a meal, mister? Is it good?" Kagami nodded in response and washed the food down with Coke.

"Want to eat mine too? Honestly, I'm sick of McD's anyway." An untouched hamburger was pushed toward him like a gift.

"Nanako, aren't you being a bit too nice?" "Shut it. I said it's fine, so it's fine!" Nanako glared at Shinobu and snatched a fry from his tray. "Wait, this one's mine! How did it end up over there?!"

"Quiet down. You always say you're getting fat and don't eat much anyway." "Ehh?! When did I ever say that?!" "You ate at McD's yesterday and the day before, so it was one of those times." "Today is different! Shinobu, if you keep talking nonsense, I won't forgive you!"

During this exchange, Kagami sat with his hand halfway extended toward the "gift," looking back and forth between their faces.

"Oh, don't worry about it. Go ahead and eat," Nanako said with a grin, so Kagami reached out.

"By the way, I didn't catch your name. What is it?" "I am called Kagami. My father named me." "Kagami? That's a strange name. What's your surname?" "What is a 'surname'?"

Shinobu and Nanako looked at each other and burst into laughter. "Stop, you're so funny! So you want us to call you by your stage name? Why don't the three of us start a band? 'Hall of Mirrors' or something, haha."

"What are you talking about?" Shinobu asked. "Stupid. Kagami means 'The House of Mirrors'."

Kagami didn't understand more than half of the conversation, but he nodded as if he did and bit into the second hamburger. He hadn't even tasted the first one, but this second hamburger had a cheap taste, reminiscent of the lunches he used to eat at the taverns back home.

"Shinobu-san, Nanako-san..." Suddenly, the taste stimulated his tear ducts. The moment he blinked, large tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Hey, Nanako!" Shinobu nudged her elbow, flustered. The tears flowing quietly from those golden eyes instantly transformed the American-style interior of the shop into a sacred space.

"Oh my... what happened?" The "mystic triangle" of silver hair, golden eyes, and crystal tears sent Nanako's consciousness into a trance. She imagined a street corner in France... pure tears overflowing from the eyes of a statue of the Virgin Mary, wetting its marble feet. Tears were the grace sent to the descendants of Adam and Eve.

When Kagami wiped his eyes with his fingertips, the world returned to normal. "I'm sorry. For you to be so kind to a total stranger..."

"Phew... you startled me." Nanako let out a long breath. "For a second there, you looked like the Virgin Mary." "The Virgin Mary??" "The mother of Christ, who died on the cross. She conceived as a virgin and gave birth as a virgin." "Is such a thing possible?" "Yeah... I think I could do it too if I really tried." Nanako gave a mischievous grin. "Right, Shinobu? I can, right? Tell him I can."

"Are you an idiot?! if you could do that, I'd be a billionaire by now—" Nanako kicked Shinobu’s leg under the table. "Super Very Bad! You're the worst!"

"Um, excuse me..." Kagami interrupted, his eyes wide. "Is it alright if I stay here? I don't know if I should be telling this to people I've just met, but..."

"What is it?" Nanako used her womanly charms to give him a brilliant smile.

"Please! Help me. I just arrived on Earth today, and I have nowhere to go."

"WHAAAAAAAT?!" The customers in McDonald's all turned around at once, and Nanako felt like she was about to trip out again.

Chapter 5:

Now, as for Kagami, Shinobu, and...

Now, though Kagami, Shinobu, and Nanako hadn't noticed, Washu's fly-type Spy-Eye was steadily transmitting information from the McDonald's ceiling back to the lab.

"What's the status, George?" "It seems he's made some friends." George, who had been monitoring Kagami since he left the Masaki house, pointed at the screen. Being able to work without sleep or rest was one of the many advantages of being a robot.

"Oh, really." Washu looked up at the screen. A young couple, who looked like they had too much time and energy on their hands, were sitting across from Kagami. The man looked a bit like a "dangerous" type—cool, with black hair and narrow eyes. The woman had long brown hair and was dressed exactly like an "Amurer" (a fan of Namie Amuro). She was small and thin, though perhaps a bit lacking in the chest department.

"A modern couple. Now why would..." Washu trailed off. On the screen, the shocking confession had just happened, and Nanako was recoiling in shock. Washu watched the screen in silence, but upon seeing the couple fall into a panic, she finally shouted:

"...He’s an idiot. A ultimate idiot. If I were Kagato, I'd beat some spirit into that pathetic brat. What is he doing asking random Earthlings for help? Watch. I bet he'll let them pay the bill and then crash at one of their houses."

"Will it really go that far?" George remained neutral.

"It will. I'd bet on it. Alright, George, I'll take over. Go prepare dinner."

"Thank you." George swapped seats with Washu.

"Oh, bring the food here. And a pot of coffee. The Olympics were boring, but this looks like it’s going to be fun."

"I shall bring it." George answered and left the lab. (*Master certainly does love this sort of thing…)* The personal thought George muttered that day was heard only by the hallway carpet.

"Now, what shall we have tonight?" Even at the dinner table, George did not reveal his professional secrets. With the Masaki household joined by Mihoshi and Kiyone, it was a lively dinner, but the conversation was entirely focused on the "revenge" from 11:00 AM onward.

"Where did that guy come from? There’s gotta be a cruiser hidden nearby."

"Coming to seek revenge against Lord Tenchi... he’s a total fool!"

"But that guy was really weak, wasn't he?"

"Hey, hey, is it true he's Kagato's son?"

"I can't believe that permanent fugitive was married!"

"Oh, you don't need to be married to have kids..."

"Mihoshi! Not in front of Sasami!" "Ah, Sis is turning red!"

"I mean, Tenchi and I could easily make one if we wanted—"

"Ryoko!!"

"Still, he was a handsome youth. George-san, didn't you see him?"

"Come to think of it, where is Washu-chan?"

"Do you think he'll come back?"

"I wonder where he is now? Has he gone home already?"

"Ayeka, you seem awfully concerned about him."

"What?! I-I'm not concerned at all..."

"I told him to come visit, so he'll probably be back."

"If I knew where he was, I would have invited him for dinner."

During this chaos, George, Tenchi, and Katsuhito ate in silence, each thinking of different things.

"He didn't seem like a bad guy. That 'Demon Star' thing was a lie, wasn't it?" The table went silent for a moment.

"Yeah, you're right. What was that fortune-telling all about anyway?"

"Washu-chan's Super Tornado Fortune Telling?" "What are you talking about?"

"Better not to ask, Mihoshi!"

"You see, a Demon Star falls from the sky and brings calamity to the Masaki house. And then, the Tree of Fate is formed!"

"...I don't really get it."

"I don't want to hear it. I'm not listening!"

"Well, only a fool ignores the wisdom of the ancients."

"Sasami, I was thinking it might be like this: the Tree of Fate looks like a Christmas tree, and all these prophecies are hanging from it like ornaments. There's a Demon Star at the top, and candles on the branches, and when you light them, the prophecies come true one by one."

"That sounds kind of scary..."

"Not at all. I thought the same thing."

"Ayeka, you're surprisingly into occult stuff, aren't you?"

Watching the women get worked up again, Tenchi felt strangely restless. *Where is Kagami now? Is he lonely, spending his first night alone on an unfamiliar planet? Or has he already returned to space?*

"What am I thinking?!" Tenchi shook his head. The combination of silver hair and golden eyes was burned into his mind like a color page from a girls' manga. *I don't even have those kinds of tastes... or is this what they call a 'fated encounter'?!*

Suddenly, a sweet image tickled Tenchi's heart. Kagami, huddled by the Tree of Fate with a golden star on his brow, weeping crystal tears.

"...Help me!" Tenchi slammed his chopsticks down and looked up at the ceiling. *I've had enough of fated lures. This isn't a bed and breakfast; I don't want any more aliens coming here, and I definitely don't want more farm work just to feed them!*

"What's wrong, Tenchi??" He realized Ryoko, Ayeka, Sasami, Mihoshi, and Kiyone were all staring at him.

"Tenchi-san, you don't look well. You should go to bed early." Sensing a "wavelength of misfortune" (as one kindred spirit to another), Kiyone looked at

his face worriedly. "Come on, Mihoshi. We're going home as soon as we finish eating. We have work early tomorrow, and Tenchi-san looks tired."

"Ehh?! Aren't we going to karaoke?" "We sang so much yesterday, and you still want to go?! You're impossible!" "Now, now, Kiyone-san," Nobuyuki soothed, but a slightly awkward air settled over the table.

"Grant me a trial," Katsuhito muttered. "Tenchi, love is something that burns deep and fierce. Take heed. The signs of suffering are upon you. Only he who accepts it can look fate in the eye." Katsuhito delivered this solemn oracle and then looked around at the stunned group. "Just kidding!"

"...Please stop with those bad jokes," Tenchi protested, feeling dizzy. "Listening to Grandpa's nonsense will only rot your ears," Ayeka said, standing up in a huff. "Did you know, Mihoshi? That's what they call a 'linguistic free-fall'," Sasami added. "Whatever, Gramps is pretty cool," Ryoko remarked. She floated up from her cross-legged position and vanished with a smirk.

"Ah! Ryoko, the dishes!!" Realizing she'd been left with the work, Sasami stood up, pouting. "If she skips out again, no seconds for her next time!"

Peace, as usual, filled the Masaki house. Tenchi stacked the bowls while planning tomorrow's farm work. Mihoshi and Kiyone said their goodnights and left, and Ayeka gave a wide yawn. The peace that Tenchi loved so much enveloped the home.

"Goodnight, Dad. Goodnight, Grandpa." Since George took over the cleanup, Tenchi decided to retire to his room. His eyelids felt heavy. "Well, whatever. It's not like anything I think about is going to change things."

Exhausted from yesterday's karaoke and today's commotion, the household soon fell silent. Except for one person in the lab, ignoring the peace with a coffee cup in hand.

"It's a waste to keep this fun all to myself," Washu murmured, lounging on the couch and watching the screen. The door opened. "Good work, George. Help yourself to the Daiginjo sake or the brandy."

"I am honored." George brought over two glass cups and poured the chilled Daiginjo.

"The bet is mine." George looked at the screen. Just as Washu had predicted, Kagami was sitting in a room, his long legs looking out of place. On a kotatsu

table (without the blanket yet) sat three mismatched promotional cups, and Nanako was pouring beer into them.

"They're having beer over there. Shall I prepare some snacks?" Washu waved a hand, signaling she didn't need any. "I'd like to give some to those three, but oh well." "So, what do you think?" "Just watch. It’s about to get interesting." On the screen, Kagami was beginning to tell his life story.

Chapter 6:

Kagami and the Art of Sitting...

Kagami couldn't sit in the formal *seiza* style, so he sat sideways on the tatami. "Will you believe me?" *Do you believe in God?* It sounded exactly like a religious solicitor on a street corner.

"I don't!" "I do!" The jury was split.

"Don't be stupid, Shinobu. They say those who believe shall be saved, right?" "Look, I'm the type who doesn't believe in things that don't make a cent. How could there be an alien who looks exactly like a human? Two eyes, one nose, one mouth, five fingers and toes on each limb for a total of twenty. Listen, Nanako, you can change hair color with dye anytime. There are things called colored contacts, too. Hey, Kagami, stop messing with us and tell us the truth."

"He says he's an alien, so he's an alien. Shinobu, you have no sense of romance." "Then what? If I said I was actually a werewolf, would you believe me?" "You're a wolf-man even without saying it."

"It's true," Kagami cut in. He seemed to be getting the hang of the timing. "The story about revenge is true, too. The boy named Tenchi is incredibly strong. He's not someone I can face head-on, but I can't just go home like this. If I tuck my tail and run, the father in my heart will laugh at me for the rest of my life. I just don't know what to do."

"Show us proof." Shinobu pressed closer to Kagami. "Huh?" "Proof you're an alien. If you show us, we could get on TV and become instant celebrities—"

"That would be a waste!" Nanako's eyes flashed with anger. "The labs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reporters, magazine interviews—they'd all come swarming. It would be huge. He'd be abducted to a hospital, the health department would issue a notice, and he'd be stuck in a sterile room until they figure out his 'unknown pathogens.' We wouldn't be able to hang out anymore. Is that what you want?!"

"That sounds like a plot from a movie." Shinobu backed down. "Anyway, no! I won't forgive you if you sell him out!" Nanako glared at Shinobu and then let out a sigh. "So, what was it? Revenge? Do you really want to do that? You came all the way to Earth, you should do something more fun."

"Nanako-san, you weren't listening to me." Kagami slumped his shoulders and poured a third beer into his cup. "I am the only son of Kagato. If I don't take revenge for my father, who will? Once I fulfill my vow, I intend to build a grave for my father near that Masaki house. Then his regret will finally be laid to rest."

"Hmm... that's a tough one." Nanako hugged her head, thinking. "Seeking revenge these days is just a murder case. Isn't it enough to just get an apology? Or maybe some settlement money?"

"You're so dumb, Nanako. You're overthinking it, that's why you're confused. Basically, it’s just a 'payback,' right? We just gather some guys who can fight and beat up this Tenchi guy. Simple."

"No, Shinobu. It doesn't mean anything if he doesn't do it himself. Maybe wait for a dark night and stab him from behind?"

"I don't have that kind of confidence at all." Kagami clutched his head. "I'm ashamed to admit it, but I've never even held a weapon. Originally, I'm a piano player. Aside from my part-time jobs, I've never held anything heavier than a musical score."

"Don't you have superpowers? Flying, walking through walls, reading minds, running at 50 kilometers per hour?" "Yeah, you must have at least one special skill, right?" Nanako pressed. "Bending spoons, card tricks, spirit photography, astral projection—anything!"

"Is such a thing possible?" Kagami’s eyes went wide. "Earthlings are terrifying." Shinobu and Nanako faceplanted onto the table. "So basically, you can't do anything but play the piano?!" "That's right." Kagami shifted his legs from the side-sitting position. "Oh, look! I can do *seiza* now!" "...At this rate, you'll be able to eat natto soon, too."

Nanako crawled toward the refrigerator. "I'm getting hungry. Want some *ochazuke* (rice with tea)?" "I'll have some!" Shinobu raised his hand enthusiastically. "May I have some as well?" Kagami asked, tentatively raising his hand while eyeing Shinobu. "Beer is delicious. May I have one more?" Kagami poured a full glass and downed it in one go.

"Hey, you! That was the last beer—" "Eh?!" Suddenly, Kagami’s body tilted. "Ah... atmospheric entry..." Kagami collapsed right there, out cold.

"Hey! You! What happened?! You're not dead, are you?!" "What's going on?!" Nanako flew over, her face pale. "Shake him! If he doesn't wake up, call an ambulance!"

Then, Kagami’s eyes opened slightly. "I'm... so sleepy... I'm sorry." He fell into a deep sleep immediately. Shinobu and Nanako remained frozen in a half-crouch, looking at each other for a while before letting out a long breath and sitting down on the tatami.

"He must be the type who doesn't show it in his face at all." "Wait, so he's just... drunk?" The homeless, penniless alien was sleeping soundly on the tatami with an innocent face.

"...Let's eat the *ochazuke*, Shinobu." "...Yeah." The two of them quietly finished their food, moved the table, and laid out the futons. "I hope he doesn't catch a cold."

"He's an alien, he'll be fine, right?" Nevertheless, Kagami had a blanket pulled up to his neck. Nanako had covered him, feeling sorry for him.

"Behave yourself tonight, Shinobu." "I know." The couple—Shinobu, 18, and Nanako, 19—who were short on cash but full of love and courage, curled up together in one futon. "Goodnight, Shinobu ♡" "Goodnight, Nanako ♡"

And so, the first night on Earth passed. Far away at the Masaki house, Washu was pounding her cushions with laughter in the lab.

"Ahahaha! This is the best! George, this is a hit. Don't you think?" "Master, eavesdropping is in poor taste." "As if you weren't laughing too." Washu picked up the bottle of Daiginjo. "It’s just been so boring lately. If Tenchi-dono were to have some epic romance, that would be one thing, but that doesn't seem likely. I mean, what's so great about a peaceful daily life? Your brain rots, your spirit goes soft, your skills get dull, Ryo-Ohki gets fat, and I bet the Light Hawk Sword is getting rusty. It’s time for Washu-chan to step in..."

"For revenge?" "No, no." Washu waved her hand. "Why would I take revenge for Kagato? I just want to put some life back into this boring routine. A workout for the spirit. If humans lose their ambition, it’s over. A 'Star of Fate' fell into our laps; it’d be a waste to let it go. So, it's time to get to work."

Washu stood up and opened another door in the lab. "Look, here it is. The Virtual Reality System we used for Tenchi-dono’s birthday. It’s gathering dust."

"Dust doesn't accumulate in a cleanroom, you know." The loyal servant George peered into the room behind her.

"It’s a figure of speech. Now, let's start the setup." Washu looked up at George and gave a brilliant smile. "You're the best assistant, George." "What are you going to do?" A hint of hesitation crept into George's voice. "It’s showtime. We're opening the door to dreams."

The look on Washu’s face at that moment would have made even the most cold-blooded person shudder. "It's alright, George. I won't force you."

The door closed, leaving only the empty bottle and the glass behind in the lab.

Chapter 7:

Kagami in the Cruiser...

Kagami was inside the cruiser, watching the Japanese islands approach. His vision was tilted; the islands were slanted, then upside down.

"W-what do I do...?" He was sure he had entered at the optimal angle... but as a mechanical klutz, he was helpless, tossed around with the cruiser. Sea, land, and sky blurred into a mosaic. The gauges were in the red, and the outer hull let out an ominous groan.

"I... I don't want this! I don't want to die without taking revenge..." Suddenly, with a violent impact, the cockpit blew apart.

"AAAAAAAHHHH?!" Kagami was thrown into the air, falling headfirst. "Help me! Professor... help me..."

Suddenly, his body felt light. Everything was pitch black. Kagami drifted slowly, sinking into the darkness. "Where am I...?" *Did I die? That can't be... I was supposed to have made it to Nanako-san's room.*

"Kagami... Kagami!" A voice was calling his name. His father's nostalgic voice. "Professor!" Kagami looked around. "You came back? You came to save me?"

A brilliant pillar of light descended into the darkness. The majestic figure of his father, Kagato—whom he had never forgotten for a moment—appeared. "Professor..."

"How dare you call yourself my son with such a pathetic display!!" A fierce reprimand rained down. Kagami flinched, shrinking back. "You always look to others for help. Have you ever reached the top of anything through your own strength? To think someone with such a fragile spirit would even dream of revenge. Tenchi is not an opponent a weakling like you can defeat. Your training is insufficient, Kagami! If you wish to reach my level, you must first obtain power. Climb up, step by step, by your own strength. Aim high, Kagami! Take control of the planet you have landed on. Set that as your goal, and the path will open."

"You're so cool, old man!" Before he knew it, Shinobu was standing to Kagami's left. "I'm moved. A man's gotta do something big once he's born. I didn't believe

a word he said, but after hearing you, I'm starting to buy it. Alright, leave it to me! I'll whip this guy into shape!"

"Stupid, you're getting ahead of yourself!" Nanako appeared on Kagami's right. "Are you really okay with egging him on like that? Even if he's your only son, isn't that too much pressure? I mean, I guess it's better than revenge, but honestly, it's cruel to make him do something that doesn't fit his personality."

"That is a woman's logic," Kagato said, looking down at Nanako. "I spent my life chasing the power that pierces the universe—the world of deeper, stronger truths. I want my son to know at least a sliver of that brilliance. He cries that he can't, slumps when he fails, and tries to run before even challenging himself. Watching you makes me so frustrated I cannot rest in peace. Choose, Kagami! Believe in the father within your heart, or end your life as a loser!"

"I hate people who talk big like that!!" Nanako stuck her tongue out defiantly. "Whoa... I don't know her..." Shinobu muttered. "A woman of courage," Kagato laughed. "If only my son had half of your bravery."

Kagato began to fade away slowly. "Wait, Professor! Don't go..." "If you are truly serious, I shall give you a few presents. Nothing much, just small gifts. They won't be a burden." "Presents? Professor, where are you right now?" "I am here... where all existence becomes light. You will understand when you wake."

The moment Kagami took a step forward, the light vanished.

"PROFESSOR!!" He bolted upright to find the room filled with actual sunlight. Cold sweat soaked his forehead, and his heart was thumping uncomfortably. "Was it... a dream?"

"Was it… a dream?"

"Mmm, what? What's wrong?" Nanako rubbed her eyes, propping herself up on her elbows.

"...Are you awake?" Shinobu remained lying on his stomach as he pulled an ashtray toward him and lit a cigarette.

"What time is it?"

"Stop smoking in bed."

"I had a strange dream. It made my heart race a bit."

“You too?” Nanako turned around, looking surprised. “Did some haughty old man named Kagato show up?”

“He did.” Shinobu blinked in astonishment. “You and Kagato…”

“No, you and Kagato… wait a sec, give me a cigarette too.”

“Wasn't I standing to the left and right of you both?”

Startled by Kagami’s voice, Nanako and Shinobu both dropped their lit cigarettes onto the futon.

“Hot…! Hey, did all of you have the same dream?”

“It appears so.” Kagami seemed lost in thought for a moment with his head down, but he suddenly flung the blanket aside and pressed his hands against the floor.

“Nanako-san, Shinobu-san! Please, lend me your strength… no, I have to do this myself. I have been reborn. If Father says so, I’ll even take over the world! Shinobu-san, Nanako-san, let’s conquer the world together!!”

Shinobu and Nanako exchanged glances from inside the futon.

“Kagami, can you even read? Do you know Earth’s customs? Just because you’re from space doesn't mean you can suddenly conquer the world. Besides, you don’t have any funds—no bank.”

“What are you saying, Shinobu? There’s no way an unemployed guy like you could conquer the world. You don’t even have wedding funds, and you want to take over the world? Kagami-chan, sorry, but I’ll pass…” Nanako trailed off.

Her eyes drifted through the air, suddenly sparkling as if she had grasped onto an idea.

“...Actually, I’m in. It’s no fun being serious anyway. You’re beautiful, Kagami, and if the three of us do something interesting, the money and people will follow. If we’re going to do it, it has to be stylish. Let’s do something that shocks the world—before I turn twenty. Hey, Shinobu. What do you want to do?”

“Rob a bank.” Shinobu grinned. “Just once, I want to swim in a sea of cash.”

“That would be a spectacular way to go out,” Nanako snickered. “The world would be shocked if you jumped off the pillars of the Great Seto Bridge. Hey, Kagami-chan, can’t you do something quick with psychic powers? Like moving that cup on the table or reading people's minds?”

“Wait a moment, I feel like I might be able to do something.”

Kagami closed his eyes and began to meditate. Nanako and Shinobu watched with bated breath, but after three minutes with no change, their concentration broke. Shinobu turned on the TV, and a morning variety show began.

“Hey, make some coffee.” Shinobu stood up and went to the kitchen, putting two scoops of grounds into the coffee maker and pouring mineral water from the fridge up to the fill line. He felt this American-style coffee was much better than anything served in a shop.

He had to wait about ten minutes for the coffee to finish dripping. Nanako had completely forgotten about Kagami and was engrossed in the TV show, but she noticed the bubbling sound of the coffee maker and stood up to get a cup.

“Hey, Kagami-chan, do you want coffee?” Nanako blinked at the crumpled blanket. “Hey, Shinobu, where’s Kagami-chan?”

Nanako looked around the room, and the moment she looked up, she nearly dropped her cup in terror. Kagami, still in meditation, was floating near the ceiling like a balloon filled with hydrogen gas.

“Kagami-chan!?”

In that instant, Kagami’s eyes snapped open. Looking at the tatami mats far below him, he stared in a daze.

“I’m floating… I’ve never floated once in my life.”

“You can get down, right?”

Kagami didn't answer. He stared intensely at the mats and, three seconds later, landed safely on the blanket with a soft thud.

“I fell, but my feet don't seem to hurt.”

Kagami spoke with such a serious face that Shinobu burst out laughing.

“You’re weird, man. Defying gravity and floating in mid-air—that’s ESP! Be more excited! Pump your fist and yell ‘Alright!’ or something.”

“...Like this?” Kagami raised his fist as he was told, though it looked more like he was about to knock on someone's door.

“Despite that face, he’s a pretty plain guy,” Shinobu sighed.

“Can you do anything else? I’m with you until the end. Let me know if you feel like you can pass through walls. You’ve definitely 'awakened' now.”

“A present… that must be it! That prideful man was worried about you! He must have shared his psychic powers with you just to give you a little confidence!”

“Father…” Kagami remembered his father’s image, his eyes welling with tears. “...I feel like I can do it. Nanako-san, do you think I look like my father?”

“You do, you’re the spitting image,” Nanako whispered encouragingly, pushing Kagami by the back to stand him in front of a full-length mirror. “Look. You see it too, don’t you?”

Kagami gazed intently at his own reflection, then suddenly thrust out one hand.

His hand passed through the surface of the mirror as if touching the surface of water, and then it disappeared.

“I did it…”

Kagami pulled his hand back out and walked resolutely toward the mirror. Just when it seemed he would crash into it, his form vanished as if being erased.

“He’s gone!!”

Immediately after, a shout echoed from the bathroom.

“Nanako-san, help me!”

Shinobu and Nanako rushed to the bathroom to find Kagami trying to crawl out of the mirror above the sink.

“I seem to have gotten lost.”

After Shinobu helped him down to the floor, Kagami looked expectedly embarrassed.

“...I think I’m getting used to the sensation of passing through sub-space.”

“Amazing…” Shinobu muttered in admiration.

“You can do it if you try! Alright, let’s draw up a plan immediately. With that power of yours, inside a bank...”

“Please stop with the bank! I didn't acquire psychic powers for something like that.”

“No way, I’m up for anything. If we have money, I can take care of you forever.”

“...Finally, we're criminals.” Nanako pressed her cheeks with both hands in excitement. “Shinobu! There’s no turning back for us now, right?”

“Are you doing this or not!?” Shinobu looked down at Nanako, exasperated.

“A bank is much more stylish than skimming profits from a convenience store.” Nanako drifted into a trance, imagining a sea of cash. In her delusion, she wore a D&G dress, flanked by Kagami and Shinobu, treading upon a carpet of banknotes in Ferragamo shoes.

“Breakfast is room service. Eye-shopping at Tiffany’s, lunch at Maxim’s. Meeting Schwarzy (Schwarzenegger-chan) in the afternoon, and Broadway at night...”

“Nanako, are you okay!?” Shinobu shook Nanako’s shoulders with all his might as she teetered on the verge of an out-of-body experience.

“Um... may I ask one thing? How exactly does one go about conquering the world?” Kagami turned pleading eyes toward Shinobu. “I want you to teach me how to rob a bank, too.”

Nanako suddenly snapped back to reality. “Are you a natural? Or just a natural airhead?” Looking at Kagami’s serious face, it was clear he was neither.

“...Shinobu, it’s no use. We have to teach him step-by-step. Before we go to a bank, we have to start from the 'A' in 'ABC.' It’s going to be a long road.”

“For now, let’s just go get something to eat.” The newly formed "World Conquest Trio" began counting the change in their wallets.

Chapter 8:

Since Kagami Left the Masaki Household...

Several days had passed since Kagami left the Masaki residence, but the social pages of the newspaper remained unchanged. Washu seemed to have completely abandoned her "Ultra Tornado Fortunetelling," and she refused to answer even when Tenchi asked.

“...Which means he really did go back to space after all.” Tenchi couldn't think of any other explanation. “Well, I guess it can’t be helped. From his perspective, we’re arch-enemies, and it didn't look like he was looking for an opening to attack.”

Tenchi followed the print in the newspaper, absentmindedly thinking about Kagami. (*Come to think of it, I've been thinking about this for three days straight... Why?*)

Tenchi questioned himself. Was it because he was Kagato’s son? Was it because his golden eyes were the same as Ryoko’s? Or was it because he had torn Kagami’s pride to shreds? Someone deep in his heart dinged the correct answer.

“I went too far against an amateur...” The expression on Kagami’s face when Tenchi had pointed the wings of the Light Hawk sword at him was stuck in his heart like a thorn. That painful, agonized expression... like a beautiful woman looking up at a thug.

“I didn't mean for it to turn out like that.”

“What are you ruminating on?” Ryoko whispered right into his ear. “You look terrible. It’s like you’re lovesick.”

“Cut it out!” Tenchi recoiled in fright. “Don't make me say the same thing every time. Stop talking into my ear so suddenly. If my lifespan shortened by a year every time you did that, I’d have been dead long ago.”

“Hmph... You enjoy it, don't you?” Ryoko wore a feigned expression of ignorance and stepped back out of Tenchi’s reach. “You haven’t even looked for help from one of us, either. Ayeka’s sob stories and the 'straight man/funny

man' routine have had no effect. Are you hoping Sasami’s cooking does the job?”

Ryoko intentionally teleported back to Tenchi’s ear and said quietly, “I’m not joking. That’s why I’m the best one to open up to… what are you so angry about!?” By the time Tenchi protested, Ryoko had already vanished. “I didn't even get to say anything...”

Tenchi began preparing to go out and folded the newspaper. He felt restless at home and decided to head into town.

Over the next few days, Kagami continued his tireless efforts. Starting from the alphabet, he learned general Japanese reading; he watched videos Shinobu collected, read manga under Nanako’s tutelage, and checked the TV listings to never miss a tokusatsu, anime, or drama. Since he was naturally high-IQ, he had no trouble with the language, but the problem was the "content." Being honest to a fault, Kagami was being dyed completely in the colors of his two companions.

While Tenchi was lost in thought over his newspaper, the trio of Kagami, Shinobu, and Nanako were focused on their "elementary lessons" while slurping cup ramen.

“Nanako-san, Shinobu-san. So, this is what world conquest is like.” Kagami straightened his back and tucked his chin. “We are conquerors from the edge of the universe. We will not forgive those who stand in our way. We shall make all of humanity kneel at our feet!”

Because he was forcing his voice low, it lacked a certain impact. “Phew...” Kagami sighed.

“Don't 'phew' me! You’re the leader, so you have to deliver your lines perfectly!” Nanako waved her chopsticks around.

“But Nanako-san, don't we need a secret base, scientists, and combatants? It won't be just the three of us, will it? If I am the leader, what roles will you and Shinobu-san have?”

“Me? It’s already decided that I’m the Queen.” Nanako declared. “I’ll wear a Fendi mini-dress and crush enemies under fifteen-centimeter heels. Naturally, the bag will be Prada.”

“You’re deciding based on the brands you're wearing?” Shinobu asked.

“Don't be stupid. I’ll bash them with the Prada bag. There's even a proverb about striking with a belt buckle, isn't there?”

“You’re a scary woman in a different kind of way.”

“Hmph...” Nanako snorted proudly. “I’ve even decided on a stylish name. We’ll need theme music, too. Oh, I wonder if Komuro Tetsuya could produce it for us.”

“Are you really going that far? The best we can do is parody or rap.” Kagami was already unable to follow the conversation at this point.

“Ah!! I’m so stupid. Then Kagami-chan won’t be able to play the piano.”

“As long as it’s cool, it’s fine. For the subordinates... let’s see. The girls will be in military mini-dresses, and the boys will look elegant in silver shirts and black-tucked baggies.”

“I’d prefer something more casual. I’ll end up looking like a host.” When it came to clothes and music, this couple wouldn't stop.

“Heh... I see. These monkeys have such petty ways of doing things lately.” Washu stared at the screen, grumbling as usual. It was footage from the "Spy Eye" planted in Nanako’s room.

“Master, what are you plotting this time?”

“It’s preparation for the second stage. My image of Kagato in the first stage was a direct hit, wasn't it? Now we enter the stage of materialization. In cooking terms, we’re gathering the ingredients... Look, look, the ingredients are walking our way. Motivating you monkeys is where I show off my skills.” George took a step back and stared at the screen.

On the screen, Nanako and Shinobu were arguing endlessly about uniforms while flipping through fashion magazines. Kagami, unable to follow the talk, was silently reading manga.

“Really, they are such little monkeys. If I, the genius scientist of the universe, Washu-chan, hadn't looked after them, who knows what would have happened.” Washu held chopsticks in one hand and pecked at a keyboard with the other, gesturing with her chin. “By now, they would have been shipwrecked by the rough waves of society and become the dregs of life. Thinking of that, Washu-chan just couldn't leave them be. Do you understand, George? Curse this motherly heart of mine. Now then…”

Washu cleared away her lunch, tapped the keyboard with the speed of a machine gun for a while, snapped her fingers to toss the keyboard into sub-space, and stood up. “I’m going out for a bit. Watch the place for me, George.”

“Where to?” To the blunt question, George listened faithfully.

“Into the screen. You can leave the camera running.” A certain reply came back.

“Hey, Nanako. How much is left in the balance?” As the three passed in front of a bank, they lowered their heads and quickened their pace, even though they hadn't done anything yet.

“I have one month's worth in my account. Yours is about the same, right?”

“Yeah... combined, we only have two months' worth.” Nanako was suddenly pulled back to reality. She vowed to start working again next month, but for some reason, that resolution vanished like mist three minutes later. “...The bank is an ill-omened place.”

Nanako muttered. She thought they should go grab some tea.

“This area is a very beautiful place.” Wearing a moss-green cap pulled low and dressed in Shinobu’s borrowed sweatshirt and jeans, Kagami looked like an international student. His long silver hair, tied back in a single ponytail, looked more and more like Kagato’s.

“It’s a nice place, isn't it?” Nanako waved boredly toward the white walls along the Kurashiki River. They had come to Kurashiki for now, but they were stuck regarding sightseeing. “Should we try going to Ivy Square?”

The three entered Ivy Square and sat down in the sparse patio. “I was thinking of shopping at Mitsukoshi, but...” Nanako tilted her head. “Whatever. The weather is nice.”

Scanning the patio, something strange caught her eye. A crystal ball sat on a corner table. A small fortuneteller sat there, wearing a deep hood that hid whether they were male or female.

“You there, the young lady with brown hair. The young man with black hair, and the young lady with brown hair.” As soon as the fortuneteller made eye contact with Nanako, they beckoned busily. “Want a reading? One of you isn't human, is he?”

“Eeeeh!?” Nanako was floored.

“If you don't want people to hear, come over here. You’re in trouble, aren't you? I’ll listen to your story for a bargain price.” Nanako approached timidly,

and the fortuneteller silently pointed to a chair. “First, you have to decide on a name. The name 'Kagami' (Mirror) would be good.”

“I don't know the details, but someone is related to a mirror, right?”

“That’s me!” Kagami’s eyes went wide. “How do you know such things?”

“I only said what I saw in the crystal ball.” The fortuneteller laughed happily. “Silver Mirror. M.O.S. The 'Ginkyo (Silver Mirror) Group.' The first step to conquering the world is giving it a name.”

“Who are you!? Show your face.” As Shinobu tried to peer into the hood, the fortuneteller smacked his hand away.

“How rude! By the way, if you don't believe me, just watch. People are going to start gathering after this. That name has magical power. Tomorrow, you’ll be at the top of the human-interest stories in the morning paper.”

“No way...” While Shinobu stood dumbfounded, the fortuneteller’s form wavered and suddenly vanished. At the same time, the crystal ball on the table disappeared. Shinobu, Nanako, and Kagami turned pale and looked at each other.

“You’ve gotta be kidding... They're gone.”

“We might be finished...” Shinobu looked around, but far from seeing any suspicious persons, not a single customer had noticed the anomaly.

“But M.O.S.? What on earth is 'Mos'!?”

“A hamburger shop? Wait, is it 'Mosquito'?”

“Was that person not an Earthling?” Kagami tried placing his hand on the seat where the fortuneteller had been sitting, but since the sun had been hitting the spot, he couldn't tell if any body heat remained.

“Hey, let’s just get out of here.” They hadn't even walked three steps out of Ivy Square before Shinobu’s cell phone rang.

“Hello? Who is this?” Shinobu spoke as he walked, then suddenly stopped and shouted back. “...How do you know that!?”

“What is it, Shinobu!?”

“He said the 'Ginkyo Group' has entered Tenmaya...” Shinobu covered the receiver with his hand, but the other party surely heard him. “Tell me to contact my associates? Hey, wait a minute!”

The phone continued to ring until they reached Kurashiki Station. Shinobu didn't even notice a round-faced, quiet-looking boy passing by who turned back to look at them.

“Kagami...?” Near the station building, Tenchi watched the back of a tall young man with silver hair tied in a ponytail. Seeing him being led along by a couple his own age, Tenchi shrugged his shoulders as if giving up.

“...No way, right?” Tenchi walked away in the opposite direction, having no way of knowing that an even more terrifying situation awaited Nanako and the others behind them.

“I’m from the Yomiuri Shimbun. You're Shinobu Hiromori-san, right? I heard you’ve formed a secret society called the 'Ginkyo Group'...”

“OHK[1] here. We heard you’re aiming for a stylish world conquest; what’s the concept?”

“I’m from the Town Guide; where is your secret base?”

“Okayama Prefecture Tourism Division. We’d like you to come to the office for a talk...”

“No way... This isn't a dream, is it!?” Nanako stood stunned, looking at the reporters surrounding them.

“It’s a miracle... It’s like winning the Canadian Lotto...”

When they finally shook off the reporters and returned home, a mountain of messages on the answering machine awaited them. *“Ah, hello, Nanako! It’s Yukari. Hey, hey, won't you let me join too?”*

The answering machine continued for over a dozen messages in the same vein, nearly running out of tape. “Shinobu... what on earth has happened to the world!?”

“It’s magic... it’s occult... the world’s screws have come loose.” Shinobu and Nanako held each other tightly and laughed as if they had lost their minds. “We’ve really become celebrities!”

“Is this... my fault?? Is it??” Looking at the two who wouldn't stop laughing, Kagami remembered that mysterious fortuneteller. (*Not an Earthling. That person surely holds all the keys...*)

---

[1] Okayama Broadcasting

Chapter 9:

The Morning Paper...

The next morning, by the time the morning edition was tossed into the mail slot, Nanako, Shinobu, and Kagami were fast asleep, exhausted. After that initial rush, friends had visited one after another. While they were busy answering phones and responding to interviews, beer was lined up on the table, sushi was delivered, and Nanako's lodging had entered a "banquet mode" with mountains of gift boxes.

And naturally, that commotion had been thoroughly covered by various magazines. Even neighbors appeared to give comments and share drinks. Silence only returned after the storm of the banquet had passed, and the victims were scattered across the room, fallen where they stood.

Because Kagami had been the first to fall into a deep sleep the day before, he had been shoved under the kotatsu with a blanket so no one would step on or trip over him. A late-arriving reporter took a photo of the leader sleeping in his cap under the kotatsu and left. If dignity was an indispensable requirement for an "evil leader," his had already hit rock bottom.

But how did word of the newly formed secret society leak to news crews and friends? Amidst this chaos that seemed like a descent into an occult space, Nanako and Shinobu had asked reporters several times, but they received no clear answer. Whoever they asked only said, "I heard it from someone," or "I heard a rumor."

It went from Shinobu's acquaintance to their acquaintance, and so on; no amount of brain-wracking would produce an answer. Normally, it was impossible for someone to know a topic you hadn't told anyone yet. Had it been transmitted via telepathy, or had Shinobu unconsciously emitted radio waves? They could only think that the fortuneteller had truly cast a spell.

However, once it was published as news in the morning paper, this ambiguous anomaly would be solidified as an "unshakable fact." Originally, this commotion had been triggered by Washu's virtual reality system, but to Nanako and the others who didn't know the reason, it was synonymous with the occult.

Reality seems like a solid monolith, yet it has unexpected gaps... the genius scientist would have answered, but unfortunately, the culprit was completely

focused on fine-tuning the system and wasn't kind enough to inform Nanako's group.

Meanwhile, the Masaki household the previous day had been the picture of peace, in contrast to Nanako's group. Even when Tenchi said he "saw Kagami at Kurashiki Station," no one believed him. The reality of the Masaki household was still functioning normally.

But that was only until the morning paper arrived.

"Aim for World Conquest!! Secret Society M.O.S. Group Formed!"

Tenchi, who woke up at seven and went to get the paper as usual, felt his mind go blank the moment he opened it.

> "Shinobu Hiromori (18) and Nanako Sewa (19), residents of Soja City, Okayama Prefecture, have formed the secret society M.O.S. (Mos) Group along with Kagami (estimated Earth age 22), who came from space. The three plan to execute various schemes aiming for world conquest in the future. The leader of the M.O.S. Group is Kagami, the combat commander is Shinobu, and the strategist is Nanako. Regarding world conquest, Shinobu says, 'I want to do something big with a bang. I happened to meet this guy (Kagami) and thought about robbing a bank, but we decided to aim higher. We just formed, so plans are still ahead, but honestly, I want to enjoy it. Well, keep us in mind.' Nanako is looking for members and says, 'I welcome anyone who wants to stylishly conquer the world with us. We want to build a secret base, so is there anyone who can provide a location? Also, donations of funds and food are very welcome. If calling us M.O.S. is uncool, call us the Mos-Mos Group ♡ It's the currently trendy "uncool-but-cute" style.' The M.O.S. Group is full of spirit, and those wishing to participate can reach them at the following contact info..."

The contact information included the address and phone number clearly, and the color photo showed Kagami, Shinobu, and Nanako smiling with peace signs.

"No way...!" World conquest!? Very welcome!?

"Good mor-ning, Tenchi ♡" Ryoko, who had been dozing on a beam, saw Tenchi frozen with the paper open and jumped down. "What, what? What's 'no way'?"

Immediately after, Ryoko burst into a roar of laughter. "Gyahahaha!! Hey, Ayeka, Sasami, look at this! Kagami is doing world conquest!" Ryoko ran up the stairs waving the paper (occasionally forgetting she could teleport), nearly knocking over Sasami, who had just come down from the second floor.

“That’s dangerous, Ryoko-oneechan.” Sasami had the newspaper shoved in her face midway up the stairs, but she too burst into laughter. “Kyahaha!! I’m going to show this to Sis.”

The paper passed to Sasami’s hands, and finally, Ayeka appeared from the top of the stairs. “What is all the laughter about so early in the morning? Is there something interesting?”

“Sis, hurry, hurry! It’s ultra-miracle-super-tornado funny. It’s the Mos-Mos Group. Mos-Mos Manju~~!”

“???” The newly awakened Ayeka furrowed her brows at the nonsensical pun, but she snatched the paper and began to read. “Pfft...” The hand holding the paper trembled slightly, and her face became like a goldfish lacking oxygen. “O-ho-ho-ho! What is this!? World conquest? What are the people of the lower world thinking...” As expected of a Princess of Jurai, her perspective was different. “But well, wasn't he doing fine? It seems Kagami-san has made friends and become noticeably brighter, and he seems to have forgotten about revenge.”

“...Is it that funny?” Tenchi felt a surge of heat and reflexively put his hand to his forehead. His forehead was moist and cold, and his feet felt unsteady. It seemed he was suffering from anemia. “Why is something like this in the newspaper!? It’s not even April Fool’s, yet they're doing world conquest with peace signs!”

Tenchi realized a terrifying fact. “Let me see that paper one more time!” He snatched the paper from Ayeka’s hand and found the problematic line. *“Kagami (estimated Earth age 22), who came from space...”*

This time he truly turned pale, and Tenchi collapsed onto the sofa while clutching the newspaper. (*From space!? Is modern-day Japan so advanced that such things are introduced as a matter of course? If so, what happens to my position, having struggled so hard to hide the aliens!?*)

“What’s wrong, Tenchi? Are you okay?”

“Tenchi-oneechan, your face is pale.”

“Was it that much of a shock?” Ryoko, Sasami, and Ayeka peered down at Tenchi in a heap.

“...No, it’s fine. It seems I was the one who was wrong.” As Tenchi stood up unsteadily, he knocked on the door of Washu’s laboratory, which he had been avoiding until now.

“Oh, Tenchi-dono. Good morning.” As if she had been waiting, the door opened, and Washu appeared. “What’s with the pale face? I have a major announcement today.”

“A major announcement...?” Tenchi was thwarted again and stiffened.

“It’s not the Ultra Tornado Fortunetelling. Just now, a revelation came that a black shadow will cover the world.” Washu closed the lab door behind her. “But, they say a Warrior of Light will appear to prevent it. I wonder who it could be. I’m thinking I’ll have to reprogram it if only nonsensical revelations keep coming out, but Tenchi-dono, do you have any idea...”

“It’s this!!” Ayeka cut in and took the newspaper from Tenchi’s hand. “Look, it says the 'Sleepy Group' right here... ah, sorry, it was the Mos-Mos Group.”

Washu shoved her face into the newspaper to examine the article, and when she looked up, she had the expression of a "Scientist of Justice."

“It finally came! This proves the correctness of my program! Forgive them not, Mos-Mos Group! Come forth, Warriors of Justice!”

“Washu-san, are you serious!?” Tenchi no longer had the energy to take the paper back.

“Oh, what’s wrong?” Washu smiled cutely. “Washu-chan is always serious. I wonder who the Warrior of Light is? Position-wise, it would be perfect for Tenchi-dono...”

“Stop it!!” Tenchi nearly stepped on the foot of Ayeka, who was behind him keeping rhythm in her panic. “I don't know anything! I have nothing to do with it! I am not moving a single step from this house!!”

“How disappointing...” Washu looked up at Tenchi reproachfully. “It would be nice if someone crushed that black shadow. Otherwise, this country will become the world of the Mos-Mos Group. Well, I suppose this is fate, too.”

“Don't call it fate...” Tenchi began a sideway "crab-walk" along the wall. “I don't want to hear the word fate. I already owe enough to fate for a lifetime. Please don't complicate my life any further. If you say one more word, I’m seriously running away from home!” Tenchi fled without even making eye contact, running up the stairs and disappearing.

“Poor Tenchi-sama... he must be completely exhausted.” Ayeka looked up the stairs and let out a soft sigh. “Despite being a Prince of Light, we are always relying on Tenchi-sama. No matter how kind Tenchi-sama is, it is only natural he would want to rest occasionally. I, the unfortunate First Princess of the

House of Jurai, Ayeka...” Here, Ayeka looked up sharply, straightened her back, and entered a countdown. “In Tenchi-sama’s stead, let us strike down evil!!”

“Oh!? Ayeka-chan, you’re sharp!!” Washu pulled out a folding fan with the rising sun on it. “Is there anyone with the courage to help? Washu-chan will give full backup.”

“I’d like to make it a two-on-one advantage; how about it? Pretty Sammy-chan?”

“Eeeeh~ Sasami!? I feel like I said this before, but what is 'Pretty Sammy'? Sasami is scared of scary things!”

“I am the leader!” Ryoko stood across from Ayeka, lowered her center of gravity, and flared her nostrils. “If you’re going to say you're the leader, then I’m out. I just have to blast that Kagami bastard, right? That’s easy.”

“Stop the violence!!” Ayeka stood her ground gallantly. “Mere violence is what yakuza do. Since we are beautiful maidens in both mind and body, let us win against evil with the power of love.”

“Win? How?”

“Now, now, Washu-chan is happy. Let’s have a slow discussion over breakfast.” Washu said. “The two from the Galaxy Police would be happy if we called them, too.” Washu fled into her lab while fluttering her fan. The moment the door closed, she rolled around laughing until she cried.

Left at the top of the stairs, Tenchi clung to the railing and looked down with hollow eyes. “It’s a conspiracy... if this isn't a conspiracy, the world has become another dimension... Washu-san, what on earth are you thinking this time!?”

After a while, George appeared and began preparing the meal as usual. “Tenchi-san! The Mos-Mos Group is on the morning variety show right now. It seems their popularity has suddenly skyrocketed.”

“O gods in heaven!” Tenchi closed his eyes and reflexively clapped his hands in prayer. “If this kind of life continues, I’m going to stop being human!”

In that moment, a fortune slip with "Great Curse" written on it descended into Tenchi’s mind.

Chapter 10:

The M.O.S. Group, AKA the Mos-Mos Gang...

The M.O.S. Group, commonly known as the Mos-Mos Gang, officially began its operations. They moved their base from Nanako's lodging, a six tatami mat room with a kitchenette, to a community building near Soja Station. Uniforms and a theme for the secret society were decided, and a practical organizational structure was established. Of course, Washu's fly-shaped "Spy Eye" moved along with them, though, as usual, no one noticed.

In truth, the path leading to this point had been a complete uproar, but the speed with which people gathered from all directions was unprecedented. Once the uniforms, the Mos-Mos Gang mark, stickers, and T-shirts were finalized, they were placed onto production lines as if by magic.

"Well then, Director Nanako, we're off! ♡" A group of girls called out in unison. They were wearing "baby T-shirts" featuring the Mos-Mos Gang mark and logo in silver and white lettering against a pale blue background.

Their bottoms consisted of simple black mini-skirts, and they completed the look with their own high-tech sneakers, looking much like promotional models for a marketing campaign.

"Okay, have a good trip!" Nanako gave a sweet smile and waved.

"Leader Kagami, please look this way... Kyaaa! So dreamy! ♡" The girls made a huge fuss before finally departing from the headquarters.

In fact, they essentially *were* promotional models. They would head out to various shopping districts to hand out Mos-Mos Gang flyers and perform dances set to the group's theme music.

"Hey, Shinobu, don't you think the name 'Anywhere Dance MAX' is a bit tacky?"

"The girls decided on that themselves. It's fine, isn't it? It's easy to understand."

Nanako looked around the headquarters and let out a long sigh. “This isn't a dream, is it?”

A large Mos-Mos Gang flag hung behind high-tech office desks, and the carpet was so plush that one could probably take a nap on it.

“Nanako-san, what exactly should I be doing?” Standing by the window, looking like a portrait, Kagami turned around. “Too many things are happening all at once... Is this really what world conquest is supposed to be like?”

“Well... I guess that’s just how it is?” Nanako lazily propped one foot up on the desk, resting her chin on her hand as she sank deep into the back of her chair.

“Look, all sorts of people showed up, right? Professionals, office workers, bosses from the shopping districts, young people, and even the local grandpas and grandmas. Everyone gathered and things just started moving forward rapidly. I got swept up in the good mood, and while I was saying 'Yeah, something like that,' it all turned into reality in the blink of an eye. Now I’ve realized we're in this huge place and I'm just as surprised as you are. That’s why I’ve ended up feeling like... well, like this.”

“Even now, I have absolutely no idea what’s going on in the office downstairs. They’re answering phones on their own, sending out transfer forms on their own, and moving forward with meetings and projects and things I don’t even understand.”

"It’s great, isn't it? Everyone else does the work for us, we don't have to spend a single cent, and the people and money just keep rolling in."

"And where is all that going, exactly? I hate this! Everyone out there is having a blast like it’s a festival, while we’re just sitting here like bumps on a log. When this massive event is over, everyone’s going to say 'good job' and go home, and we’ll be right back in our old crummy apartment. It feels pointless!"

"Maybe we’ve been conquered by capitalism," Shinobu mused.

"No, we’re being played for suckers. At first, when everyone gathered around and cheered us on, I thought 'Lucky! What a bunch of easy marks!' But when you really think about it, we’re just the bait. Hey, Kagami, remember what I said? In some magazine interview, I talked big about how we were going to become legends, sell tons of merch, and be super famous. And now that’s actually happening, right? But it’s... too easy. It’s weird. I’m not happy about it."

"I thought world conquest would be much harder," Kagami said thoughtfully. "I thought, like my father said, we’d conquer the surrounding towns one by one,

bringing them under our control, and only when the entire planet was in our grasp could we say we'd conquered the world."

"If we did it that way, we'd grow old and die before we finished. My idea of world conquest was us becoming fashion leaders, making everyone obsessed with us, and raking in the cash. But now that it's actually happening, it's boring."

"We really are just monkeys after all," Nanako sighed, staring at the ceiling. "It's like... the ones being played aren't having fun, while the ones pulling the strings can't stop laughing. That's it!!"

Nanako bolted upright.

"It doesn't mean anything if *we* aren't having fun! Kagami, you've got your revenge. Shinobu, you make the plans. We're going to do a *real* world conquest. We'll draw up a truly villainous plot, something so wicked that that Jurai Prince you mentioned has no choice but to show up. It'll be intense! It'll be blood-curdling! Yeah, a world conquest without a hero is something even a monkey could do!!"

"Nanako..."

Shinobu was moved. In his state of emotion, he did something he hadn't been able to do lately because there were always people around. He pulled Nanako close and kissed her pearl-pink lips with a week's worth of pent-up love.

"Must be nice..."

No sooner had Kagami muttered those words than there was a knock at the door.

"Hellooo, M.O.S. crew! I've come to help."

The door opened to reveal the black-cloaked fortune teller from before.

"Weren't you just talking about a truly villainous world conquest? If that's the case, leave it to me, the mysterious fortune teller WAX-chan! Come up with a fun plan for me. I can make anything—from mechs and monsters to cyborgs, robots, secret weapons, and even transport devices. So, what'll it be?"

The mysterious fortune teller smirked from beneath her hood.

"A... a monster showed up!!" Nanako gripped Shinobu's hand tight.

"How rude! I'm not a monster, I'm a mysterious fortune teller. Call me WAX-chan ♡"

"You... you aren't human, are you? Who on earth are you!?" Kagami demanded.

"Do you really want to see? Really? Rea~lly??"

The fortune teller flipped back her hood, revealing a young girl with red hair.

"Kagami-chan, you aren't the only alien on Earth. I'm the original Professor, the greatest scientific genius in the universe—Washu-chan! Though I suppose you wouldn't know me."

"I don't... but somehow it sounds familiar... No, wait, I'm terrible with machines!"

"Don't worry, don't worry," Washu consoled Kagami with a straight face. "You worry too much. Sigh... to think I'd end up looking after two generations of this family..."

"What!?"

"Oh, nothing. Just talking to myself..."

Washu clasped her hands behind her back and scanned the headquarters. "I thought it would look a bit more like a secret society, but oh well. Now then, let the strategy meeting begin!"

"Y-yes..."

Nanako and Shinobu nodded, completely overwhelmed.

Meanwhile, Ayeka and the others, who had been all fired up to "strike down evil in Tenchi's place," had prepared matching outfits and even practiced catchphrases. But when no incidents occurred, their excitement quickly fizzled out.

Instead of fighting evil, they spent their time looking at magazines and buying merchandise, essentially becoming groupies of the Mos-Mos Syndicate.

"This tiny T-shirt is so cute! I hope they come out with stickers and world conquest pencils soon," Sasami said.

"I'd be happy if they released furikake (rice seasoning), chocolates with prizes, or trading cards," Mihoshi added.

"Looking at him like this, Kagami really is handsome. It's such a shame his personality is so... perverted," Kiyone remarked. For some reason, Mihoshi and Kiyone were fully participating members of the group.

"The guy's an idiot. A total moron. Having a face just like Kagato gives me a headache," Ryoko grumbled.

"They even started a homepage recently. I don't know who's making it, but they have excellent taste," Ayeka sighed. "I wish they'd stop focusing so much on business and actually *do* something."

"Oh? Does the Princess of Jurai have a thing for weaklings like him?" Ryoko grinned wickedly. "You actually just want to see Kagami, don't you? 'Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the Kagami-est of them all?'"

Ayeka, without a word, smacked the back of Ryoko's head.

"Those vulgar puns are enough to rot one's ears! Ryoko, I don't know what you're misunderstanding, but I am doing this for Lord Tenchi..."

"One look~ just one look~ I want to see him just once~ ♪" Ryoko sang.

"Ryoko!!"

Ayeka turned beet red and trembled, then abruptly stood up and stormed out of the living room.

"I... was thinking of Lord Tenchi..."

A sharp pain tightened in her chest, and her throat felt constricted. She felt pathetic and angry, her emotions a tangled mess.

"Lord Tenchi hasn't even spoken to me lately... He doesn't have to go so far to avoid me."

To hide her tears, Ayeka stepped down into the entryway. It was always her job to collect the mail.

"Oh? The sender is..."

Ayeka tilted her head as she took a letter from the mailbox. It was a plain white envelope with nothing but the recipient's name: *To Lord Tenchi Masaki*.

Female intuition kicked in, and Ayeka tore the envelope open before she could even think.

"Dear Lord Tenchi Masaki,

We, the M.O.S. Syndicate, are finally commencing our world conquest. This evening, near Soja Station, it's the Great Kidnapping Operation! We humbly request the presence of a hero.

Supreme Leader of the M.O.S. Syndicate, Kagami"

"My goodness..."

Ayeka completely forgot she had been on the verge of tears moments ago. She dashed back inside.

"This is terrible! A challenge has arrived from the Mos-Mos Syndicate!"

"What, a challenge!?"

Ryoko appeared instantly. Those two really were in perfect sync.

"Interesting... I'll go give them a piece of my mind! Tell them to wash their necks and wait!"

Ayeka grabbed Ryoko's hair just as she was about to teleport.

"It's still morning! If you're going, take this letter to Lord Tenchi in the fields first."

"Got it, fine." Ryoko grabbed the envelope and vanished.

"Tenchiii~~"

Ryoko appeared in the carrot field, wrapped her arms around Tenchi's neck while still holding the envelope, and—taking advantage of the fact that no one was looking—planted a loud kiss on his cheek.

"Whoa...!" Tenchi felt like he'd been jumped by a mountain cat. "Ryoko, I told you to cut that out. What is it?"

"Tenchi... here. A love letter." Ryoko handed over the white envelope, acting as bashful as a middle schooler.

"A love letter? Don't joke around, you've never even written a letter."

Tenchi noticed the envelope was already open and furrowed his brows suspiciously.

"Well, I think it's basically the same thing."

Tenchi read through the challenge, then handed it back to Ryoko without a word.

"Sorry, but I’m strictly staying out of this. Ayeka already read it, didn't she? Then I’ll leave it to her."

"I knew it. I figured you'd say that. It wouldn't be scary if we all just played along together, though."

"No. I’m just not built for that kind of 'play'."

Tenchi stubbornly picked up his hoe and resumed his farm work.

"You're strangely stubborn about things like this. But I love you anyway ♡"

Ryoko grinned and kissed his other cheek. "To be honest, I don't really care either, but I can't stand missing out on the fun. I'll tell Ayeka you said 'hi'."

"Yeah... don't overdo it. You won't be able to take it back later."

By the time he added that, Ryoko was already gone, leaving Tenchi feeling exhausted.

"I'm not going, even out of spite. I’m going to protect my normal life. I won't be made to dance like a monkey for some street performer."

Tenchi struggled with the carrot field out of sheer stubbornness, but suddenly threw down his hoe and sat on the dirt.

"Washu-san. You're the one pulling the strings, aren't you? It was the same on my last birthday. I remember that Virtual Reality System thing going haywire. You can hear me, can't you? I hate that kind of thing. Using the power of machines to make people do what you want is wrong. I don't care if things don't go my way, I want to do things with my own power. Even Kagami-san—he seemed like a serious, good guy, and it feels like you're just toying with him. If you keep this up, I'm going to tell him everything. Please stop this already!"

"My master really is a cruel one..."

George, looking after the lab while Washu was out, muttered to the sub-monitor.

"Even if she is a 'mad scientist' by nature, helping with world conquest... people would call her a monster. Well, I understand she can't leave Kagami-san alone since he's Kagato's son and they have a connection, but wasn't it because of that kind of personality that she was expelled from the Science Academy? Well, I gave up on complaining the moment I signed the contract. We robots have the Three Laws, after all—we aren't supposed to harm humans. Seeing Lord Tenchi makes my chest ache... put simply, my conscience is bothering me. My master's Virtual Reality System has the power to transform reality itself, even if it is limited to a specific area... To a human, it's nothing short of magic."

George felt a sense of unease and checked the program via Washu's Super Tornado Fortune Telling. Today's fortune showed a Seimei-mon (star symbol) representing a devil star, and an angel's halo representing the warriors of light.

"It couldn't be... surely my master isn't the 'devil star', is she!? They say fortune telling can't reveal things about the person doing it."

But even if it were true, what could he do now? George let out a very un-robot-like sigh.

"Master... please, be a good witch."

Chapter 11:

In Front of Soja Station, Students Head to Cram School...

In front of Soja Station, small groups of elementary and middle school students were walking toward their cram schools. The evening is a time when housewives, office workers, and students mix together in a sort of Brownian motion.

"They're late..."

Ayeka and the others, dressed in pink, blue, yellow, white, and purple cocktail dresses, peeked out from an alley to watch the main street. The dresses were knee-length, with soft chiffon layered over satin like twin flower petals—a retro style. They were sleeveless but paired with pure white gloves that reached above the elbow, and satin ribbons of the same color as the dresses were tied in their hair, reminiscent of 60s Barbie fashion.

Naturally, there had been many twists and turns before deciding on these dresses, but since Ryoko was the only one against it, she had been overruled. For the record: Sasami was Pink, Ryoko was Blue, Mihoshi was Yellow, Kiyone was White, and Ayeka was Purple.

"Do they plan to stand us up after sending a challenge?"

Suddenly, a gunshot echoed through the crowd, and the theme song of the Mos-Mos Syndicate began to play. There was a gunshot, but since no one fell, it seemed to be a sound effect.

M.O.S. On the street corner, at the intersection, we just met The other 'you' that even you don't know M.O.S. In the corner of the world, in the very center, smiling now The other 'truth' that nobody knows

Love and hope don't quite ring true But the things you catch yourself shine even without a name Don't name it, don't lock it up, don't chase it But believe, the day of meeting will come, it'll come diving in...

Kagami, Nanako, and Shinobu appeared along with a group of girl dancers. They had clearly practiced, as the dancing was perfectly in sync.

"I'll choose you!"

Nanako caught an elementary schooler carrying a cram school bag. "The Mos-Mos Syndicate is going to turn you into a super cool cyborg!"

"What, me? All right! Now I don't have to go to cram school!" The boy jumped for joy.

"My lady, I invite you to join M.O.S."

Kagami bowed to a young woman who looked like an office worker. "Now, give me your hand."

"What, me? Oh my..." The woman looked up at Kagami dreamily and gently placed her hand in his.

"Anyone else want to be kidnapped? Anyone who wants to be reborn in M.O.S, come on down! I'll take care of all of you at once!" Shinobu waved, and the crowd of onlookers surged forward.

"Now, something mysterious is about to happen to everyone inside this magic circle. Inside the M.O.S Syndicate's magnetic field, you can do anything! Miracles will happen! Close your eyes, clear your minds, and believe in the wonder. Countdown, start!"

"10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1... BREAK!"

The "Anywhere Dance MAX" girls shouted in unison. Suddenly, a spiral of light hissed and enveloped the people inside the circle.

"Ooooh!?"

Men and women, young and old, who were inside the circle turned into members of the Mos-Mos Syndicate in the blink of an eye. It was a chaotic scramble of Kagami, Shinobu, and Nanako duplicates.

"I turned into Nanako-san!" a high-pitched voice cried. A raspy voice replied, "I've got a nice body now, too!" "I'm so handsome~" "My, so am I."

"Wait? Huh? What!?"

Ayeka and the others jumped out from the alley, looking around in confusion. They couldn't tell which ones were the real Kagami and his crew.

"Mos-Mos Syndicate, how cowardly! This isn't a kidnapping operation, it's a confusion tactic! Where are the real ones?"

Thirty Nanakos, thirty Kagamis, and thirty Shinobus laughed all at once.

"It's me~ it's me~ it’s me~" "It's me, right here, can you tell?" "I'm here, here, here... who on earth are you guys??"

Laughter erupted once more.

"We are the warriors of justice, the Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls! We’ve been on standby for a week to protect world peace. Mos-Mos Syndicate, stop your futile resistance! We will never allow world conquest!!"

"Never heard of any 'Pri-Pri Dolls'!" the fakes shouted back at Ayeka.

"Well, of course you haven't. We only just arrived."

"Oh dear..." As usual, Mihoshi missed the mark at the worst possible moment.

"Regardless! If you don't tell the truth, we’ll arrest everyone!"

"Are you guys the police!?" 90 people (30 of each) shouted back in unison.

"What should we do, Sister Ayeka?" "I haven't the slightest idea." "What a pain. I’ll just punch everyone until I find them..." "It wouldn't be very 'warrior of justice' to start using violence first." "Oh, if only Lord Tenchi were here..."

(In this case, it’s doubtful his presence would help, but moving on.)

"Alright everyone, we’re going to kidnap you now, so please follow us!"

Following the lead of "Anywhere Dance MAX," the Nanako group, the Kagami group, and the Shinobu group all began to troop away.

"Wait! Are you all really okay with this!?" Kiyone called out.

"Why wouldn't it be? I’ve become the person I admire, I’m truly happy. Don't get in our way, Miss Pri-Pri Doll," a woman’s voice called back from the Kagami group.

The Mos-Mos Syndicate was terrifying. These people had *chosen* to fall into their hands. Ayeka and the others could only stand there, stunned.

"Hey Sis, there’s nothing for us to do. Should we go home?"

Sasami looked at the kidnapping volunteers somewhat enviously. She clearly thought it looked more interesting over there.

"What is this!? After we went to all the trouble of coming!" Ayeka was fuming.

Thus, the first battle was a total defeat for Ayeka and her group.

"I knew Tenchi-dono wouldn't show up."

From a corner of the street, a mysterious figure watched them. It was a cloaked fortune teller sitting behind a small table and a crystal ball.

"Well, let’s take our time with this..."

"Hey, hey, there's a weird person over there staring at us..."

Mihoshi, who was bored, pointed at the small fortune teller, but Kiyone dismissed it. "There are fortune tellers everywhere. Come on, it’s time for work."

The Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls shuffled away.

The next day. A second challenge arrived in the Masaki mailbox.

"Dear Lord Tenchi Masaki,

Thank you for the eye candy yesterday. But our plans don't end there. Next time, it's the Human Levitation Gas in the shopping district during lunch break!

Supreme Leader of the M.O.S. Syndicate, Kagami"

"It's here again!" "Alright, let's go!"

Even though it was right after yesterday’s events, the warriors of justice, who had been loitering in the Masaki living room since morning, were energized by the words "lunch break."

"There isn't much time left! Everyone, please get ready quickly."

When Ayeka and the others rushed to the Soja City shopping district, there was no sign of Kagami, "Anywhere Dance MAX," or even the citizens. The street was deserted.

"Huh? Nobody’s here?" Sasami said. "That can't be. The challenge clearly said lunch break..."

"Yahoo! You guys are late."

Nanako’s voice drifted down from above. When Ayeka and the others looked up in shock, the space above the utility poles was crowded with people enjoying a mid-air stroll.

"Too bad! The gas is all gone~. Just stay down there and watch with your fingers in your mouths!"

Nanako laughed and led the "Anywhere Dance MAX" girls as they slid through the air.

"They’re mocking us!" Ryoko kicked off the ground in a rage. "Wait, you woman! Flying through the air when you're just a human... I won't allow it!"

Ryoko shoved past an office worker in a suit who was drifting peacefully and gave chase.

"Whoa, that big sister is flying without any levitation gas!" "That’s bad! Cheating is bad!" Children from a nearby kindergarten shouted.

"Everyone, come over here, it's dangerous." A young woman, presumably their teacher, grabbed two children who were trying to chase Ryoko while holding on to their rice balls and brought them back into the group.

"Ryoko-sis is gone," Mihoshi said, literally watching with her finger in her mouth while looking up at the kids eating lunch. She turned around as if she’d had a realization. "So, what now? I’m hungry too..."

"You really are something!" Kiyone tried to snap at her, but she lacked conviction. "Let's leave it to Ryoko and go buy some lunch."

Ayeka started walking dejectedly, but unfortunately, the supermarket, the deli, and the bento shop were all empty of staff, so they couldn't buy anything. The restaurants were open, but the customers and staff were all in the sky; there was no one left to take an order.

"Sis, let's just go to the supermarket and take some lunch. We can pay for it later." "If we do that, we’ll be called thieves! No thank you, I will wait until everyone comes down."

Ayeka snapped back with a frown, but the more she thought about it, the angrier she got.

"Don't you all feel any shame? Proper humans should stand with their feet on the ground, not fly through the air! If you keep doing whatever the Mos-Mos Syndicate tells you, don't blame me when something terrible happens later!"

"What are you all shouting about?" A real estate agent who had taken off his jacket for a nap woke up. "They said the levitation only lasts for thirty minutes. What's the harm? It's not like it's actually hurting anyone. I've dreamed of flying since I was a kid. My second dream was to nap on a cloud. The Mos-Mos Syndicate is great! Why don't you guys try asking them?"

"Leave us alone!!" Ayeka screamed back, fuming.

"Must be nice... Sasami wants to fly, too. It's not fair that only Ryoko-sis gets to." "Sasami!"

Mihoshi and Kiyone exchanged glances. "Honestly, we just look stupid standing here shouting." "It seems everyone in this town is on the side of the Mos-Mos Syndicate." "So they're welcoming the conquest?" "Yeah. I bet they think we're just getting in the way."

Up in the sky, that was exactly what was happening.

"What's the big idea, Kagami!? Is your world conquest just a big joke?" "I feel like I'm doing this seriously," Kagami looked at Ryoko curiously. "How are you flying without any levitation gas? Are you not an Earthling either?" "Obviously! You haven't heard of Ryoko the Space Pirate?" "Nope."

Kagami answered so bluntly that Ryoko almost tumbled out of the air.

"You're in the way, lady. You're noisy, go somewhere else," a man listening to a radio nearby shouted at Ryoko. "That's right! You're with those 'Pri-Pri Dolls', aren't you? We're doing this because we want to, so leave us be!" some middle-aged ladies were having a picnic in the sky with a thermos and sandwiches.

"Shut up! I'm having an important conversation here! You guys go somewhere else!" The middle-aged ladies were scandalized. "My, how vulgar! The Mos-Mos Syndicate is much more gentlemanly!" "Seriously, picking a fight like that." "Look at that awful hair! It's all standing on end!"

"...They're annoying, let's go over there, Kagami." Ryoko, having lived on Earth for a long time, knew from experience that you get torn to shreds if you try to take on a group like this.

Ryoko and Kagami moved to a building rooftop. Nanako and Shinobu, who arrived halfway through, joined them.

"Look, I’m not wearing this outfit because I like it. Ayeka got all fired up, and I just got dragged along. But since you guys aren't taking this seriously, there’s no way to fight. Usually, an evil secret society conquering the world does indiscriminate killings, or terrorism, or puts poison in a dam, right? Like a certain someone I know. Don't go running events and campaigns like you're some pop idol. What's the point in making girls and kids happy?"

"Hey, is it a crime to be liked? We live here, too. We can't get anything done if we’re outcasts. It’s better to have everyone enjoy themselves and cooperate. And hey, can't you do something about that tacky outfit?" Nanako wrinkled her nose and looked over Ryoko’s costume.

"We aren't stupid. Whether it’s home appliances or anything else, the ones who hold the decision-making power are the women and children. If we have a high approval rating, people will accept us more easily, right? I think we’ve already conquered this town. And from here, it’ll spread through word of mouth. If people can only see events or buy merch here, it’ll help revitalize the town." Shinobu spread his arms wide and looked down at the shopping district.

"But that guy Tenchi who’s with you—when’s he coming out? We heard he can use an amazing technique called the Light Hawk Sword, so we’ve been waiting and sending challenges. Or is he the type to hide behind a girl’s skirt and just watch?"

"Ugh..." Ryoko was stumped. She could see that at this rate, she’d end up having to bring Tenchi. "Listen, Tenchi has been in some real, non-joking battles. He’s not free enough to play along with this. What are you going to do even if you drag him out?"

"Who knows? We are aiming for world conquest, after all. If he doesn't come soon, we’ll make the challenge public. I wonder who’ll be the laughingstock then?"

"...Dammit." Ryoko had been backed into a corner. "Fine, I’ll bring him! I’ll shove that challenge right back in his face. We’ll have a showdown in front of everyone and see who wins!"

"Then it’s a deal. Three days from now, on Sunday, we’ll have a big event: 'The Unknown Hero Tenchi vs. Everyone’s Idol, the Mos-Mos Syndicate'! Make sure you tell him."

Shinobu looked at his watch and began to float up. "Alright everyone, lunch break is almost over. I’m going to start the countdown, so get ready. Here we go~!"

"10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5..." The "Anywhere Dance MAX" girls began the countdown over loudspeakers.

"4, 3, 2, 1... BREAK OUT!"

At that moment, the floating people began to fall like stones.

"KYAAAAA!!" A chorus of screams erupted, and it looked like the town was headed for a disaster. Naturally, those screams included Ayeka and the others who were looking up from the ground.

"Mos-Mos Syndicate, save us!!"

Just before they hit the ground, everyone's bodies came to a dead stop. A split second later, they landed softly on their feet. A storm of applause and cheers broke out, and Shinobu, Nanako, and Kagami waved back from the rooftop.

"The big event is in three days, this Sunday! We're calling out those silly Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls, and we've got a super special guest joining us. Everyone, make sure to check the bulletin board in front of the M.O.S. office!"
"You got it!!"

Before Ayeka and the others could blink, a fan club—formed who knows when—dressed in cosplay as Kagami and his two companions shouted back in unison.

"Let's go, Ayeka," Ryoko said, appearing with a grim expression. "Dammit... those guys really played us."

And so, the second battle ended in a total victory for the Mos-Mos Syndicate. Ayeka and the rest of the group trudged home on empty stomachs.

"Heh heh heh... It seems things went quite well."

Behind a small table with a crystal ball, Washu, wearing her black cloak, smirked to herself.

"It's all about the strategy. Washu-chan really is a genius."

Once again, it was Mihoshi who noticed her.

"Hey, hey, Kiyone-chan! That fortune teller is there again."

"So what if she is? Why do you care so much?"

"Because that red hair... I feel like I've seen it somewhere..."

Kiyone whipped around, but the table, the crystal ball, and the fortune teller were already vanishing into thin air.

Chapter 12:
Back at the Masaki Household...

The first thing Ayeka and the others did upon returning home was eat lunch. If George hadn’t prepared curry for them, the starving and irritable Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls would have been a nightmare to deal with. Even with full bellies, they were fuming after being made fools of for two days straight.

"Lord Tenchi! I am absolutely fed up with the Mos-Mos Syndicate making a mockery of us!" Ayeka wailed.

"Told ya. Things won't settle down as long as you refuse to show your face," Ryoko added.

"I like going out every day, but I hate that the housework is piling up," Sasami sighed.

"And we have our part-time jobs..." Kiyone started.

"But it’s actually kind of fun, isn't it?" Mihoshi chimed in with her usual awkward attempt at optimism.

"I never asked you guys to go in my place. If you hate it that much, just stop going," Tenchi said.

"TENCHIIII!!"

The suffixes varied—Lord, -san, Big Brother—but the resentful tone was unanimous.

"That is a heartless thing to say! I only took this on because I felt sorry for you, Lord Tenchi!"

"Maybe I should just go and blow them all away. It’d be easier," Ryoko grumbled. "Seriously, 'Mos-Mos Syndicate'? 'Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls'? Why are all these names so ridiculous? If I, the terrifying Space Pirate Ryoko, really got serious, world conquest would be over in a heartbeat."

"If you start talking like that, we—the elite duo of the Galaxy Police—won't stand idly by!" Kiyone snapped.

"Oh, come on! Why are you guys fighting? Our teamwork is a total mess..." Sasami lamented.

"So, what exactly do you want from me?" Tenchi sighed. "You want me to be the 'hero of justice' and defeat evil? Don't be ridiculous. I'm not going out there just to embarrass myself in front of a crowd that's clearly enjoying the show. I am absolutely not going. Why don't you ask Washu?"

"Well, that's where the problem is," Ryoko replied sullenly. "I got into an argument with them and made a promise. I told them I'd bring you and shove that challenge right back down their throats. It's set for Sunday. If you don't show up, we'll be the laughingstock of the whole town. Come on, Tenchi—do it as a favor to me? Just show up. If things get hairy, I'll be the one to knock 'em flat, okay?"

"Ryoko..."

Tenchi was trapped. He knew someone was pulling the strings from the shadows, making sure he had no choice but to participate. And that person was currently acting like she had nothing to do with it, hiding away in her lab: the resident genius of the Masaki house.

"Washu-san!" Tenchi stood up and knocked on the lab door. "I know you're in there. I know you're listening. Come out!"

"Um... I don't think Washu-san is in there right now," Mihoshi interjected timidly. "I saw her wearing a black cloak near the shopping district, staring right at us."

"WHAT!?" Ryoko flew over. "Mihoshi! If you're making stuff up, I'll knock your teeth out!"

"But... I'm sure it was her! Red hair sticking out like crab legs, about this tall... That's Washu-san, right? Who else could it be?" Mihoshi protested tearfully.

"Wait! So that really *was* Washu?" Kiyone cut in. "I saw her too! Or rather, the moment I thought I saw her, she vanished along with the black cloak. If that was Washu, she really was spying on us."

"But why? Why would Washu-san be doing this to us...?"

Ayeka and the others looked at each other, pieceing together the fragments of the puzzle.

"Washu-san was the one who first brought up the 'Devil Star' thing, wasn't she?" Ayeka whispered.

"Now that you mention it, she’s been cooped up in the lab this whole time. Usually, she loves stuff like this," Sasami added.

"And George only comes out when Washu-chan isn't around, and he keeps taking food into the lab."

"Kagami-san is Kagato’s son, right? And Kagato was Washu-san’s top pupil..." Mihoshi said thoughtfully.

"People usually wear disguises when there's something they don't want others to know, or if it would be bad if their true identity was revealed," Kiyone stated logically.

"That Kagami brat walked home, so he shouldn't have any special powers. If he could transform people or make them float, he would've done it when he first came for revenge," Ryoko said, her face darkening as she clenched her fists.

"Washu-san has a Virtual Reality System in her lab. You might have forgotten," Tenchi reminded them.

"Virtual Reality System?"

"You used it on my birthday. You know, the one where you and Ayeka got all 'lovey-dovey' and turned my birthday into some weird festival of 'love and peace'?"

"...I remember now." Ryoko gritted her teeth. "So that means... Washu is helping the Mos-Mos Syndicate!? Dammit! I'm going to wring her neck!"

Ryoko kicked her chair back and stood up. "Making a fool out of us! 'Devil Star' my foot! She’s the one pulling the strings!"

"That’s the only explanation," Tenchi said bitterly. "Washu-san! I am NOT going, not even if I die!!"

Meanwhile, the rumored fortune teller, Washu, was pacing around the M.O.S. headquarters, giving a pep talk to Kagami and the others.

"The final battle is almost here! You have to look cool, like a proper trio of villains. Washu-chan will provide the giant mechs and monsters. Kagami, you need to practice your sub-spatial movement and swordplay. Lord Tenchi is seriously strong—he did defeat your father, after all. At your current level, the probability of you even grazing him is 0.01%. Winning? You've got a better chance of the sun rising in the west."

"Sun rising in the west!?" Kagami asked, confused by her colorful phrasing.

"It’s an expression... never mind, no time to explain! Get in that door and start training. It’s a simulation space with a virtual body programmed with all of Tenchi’s movements. If you practice thousands of times, you'll eventually grasp his patterns. Don't worry about winning. Just focus on finding a single opening. There’s a food bar inside with special blends that will recover your stamina to 100% in a five-minute break. The rest is a battle of will. Practice is everything. Go get 'em!"

"Yes ma'am!" Kagami replied like a dedicated athlete. "But Washu-san, why are you doing all this for us? You don't even know me."

"Because you guys are such adorable monkeys!" Washu looked away for a moment, pretending to think. "I’ve done everything there is to do in my long life, but playing with kids like you makes me feel like a child again. It’s quite fun."

Nanako and Shinobu looked at each other.

"I don't really get what she means," Shinobu whispered.

"Me neither."

"That’s why I called you monkeys," Washu smiled brilliantly. "But compared to the boring people out there, you're the most wonderful monkeys I've met."

"Fine, so I'm an idiot," Shinobu pouted.

"Don't keep calling us monkeys! I'm known for my 'mod' style, you know."

"I was complimenting you," Washu replied nonchalantly.

Three days later...

A special stage had been set up in the parking lot in front of City Hall. Banners were everywhere, reading: *[FINAL SHOWDOWN! The Unknown Hero Tenchi vs. Everyone's Idol, the M.O.S. Syndicate]*. Despite it being Sunday, the city employees were all out working. A massive crowd had gathered since morning. With food stalls and goldfish scooping, it felt like a summer festival. The shopping district had set up its own stalls, and the main street was closed to vehicles, filled with citizens holding beers, eagerly waiting for the show to start.

3:00 PM.

An ear-splitting gunshot rang out from the giant speakers on the stage, followed by the M.O.S. theme song. The "Anywhere Dance MAX" girls performed their usual sexy dance.

"Hellooo! We are M.O.S., also known as the Mos-Mos Syndicate! Thanks for coming out in such huge numbers today!"

"Everyone, tired of waiting? Today is finally the day of the big battle. Are the Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls here? Don't tell me you got bored and went home~!" Shinobu shouted, drawing a roar of laughter from the crowd. He and Nanako were clearly getting used to the spotlight.

"M.O.S. is going to do it! Today's operation is a bit different—it's a 'tasty' one. Does everyone want to be happy and lovey-dovey?"

"YESSSS!!" the crowd roared.

"No matter what happens, do you 'I Believe' in the Mos-Mos Syndicate?"

"YEAAAH!!"

"Who's going to win the showdown?"

"M.O.S.!!"

"Then let's get right to it. Part One: The Happy Lovey-Dovey Phantom!"

On cue, monsters wearing yellow smiley-face masks with heart-shaped eyes appeared throughout the venue. They moved through the crowd, breathing on people. Those hit by the breath immediately developed "heart eyes" and began hugging whoever was closest.

"Ahaha, this looks kind of fun!" Mihoshi pointed at a college student who was now literally "heart-eyed," hugging everyone in sight. As he did, a pink heart drifted out of the chest of the person he hugged. The student opened his mouth wide, swallowed the heart, and moved on to the next person.

"Mihoshi... something is wrong!" Kiyone noted. The people whose hearts were taken saw their faces change into yellow smiley masks. They, in turn, began breathing on others and swallowing their hearts.

"I don't like this. Ryoko-sis, Sasami is scared..." Sasami clung to Ryoko and shut her eyes tight.

"Dammit... this isn't the usual silly Mos-Mos Syndicate."

"It’s scary, isn't it~? Today is an occult special~!" Nanako whispered from the stage.

"Ayeka! Watch Sasami!" Ryoko shouted as she dashed forward. She landed a spinning kick on a "Happy Mask" phantom. The phantom deflated like a popped balloon and vanished. "These things aren't human!"

Ayeka looked up in shock. "But... which ones are the real phantoms!?"

Mihoshi and Kiyone looked at each other as they prepared to jump in.

"Are you happy?" A phantom approached them.

"No, no! Please stop!" Mihoshi instinctively unleashed a three-hit combo: slap, knee, and a massive kick. The phantom went down, and its form flickered before turning back into a normal human.

"Oh dear... it was just a regular citizen."

"Pri-Pri Cutie Dolls, violence is bad~," Shinobu called out from the stage. "Hurry up and call your hero, Tenchi-kun. Otherwise, we’re moving on to Part Two!"

A giant mech rose from behind City Hall. It was a retro, cheap-looking tin robot with a riveted body and flat feet that looked like discarded wooden clogs. It marched forward with a mechanical clanging, its giant wind-up key screeching.

"ARE YOU HAPPPPYYYY!?"

People tried to run, but since more than half the crowd had already turned into "Happy Phantoms," the scene lacked its usual urgency. The robot continued to march, seemingly shy or perhaps just single-minded, chasing people down.

"Well, Cutie Dolls? Is Tenchi-kun still not here?"

"Mos-Mos Syndicate, how cowardly!" Ayeka shouted while shielding Sasami. "Lord Tenchi is not here! No matter what you do, it's useless!"

"Oh, what a shame. Then I guess it’s a win by default for the Mos-Mos Syndicate," Nanako said with a smile, waving to the crowd. "But we're going ahead with Part Three anyway!"

The robot suddenly stopped moving.

"Part Three is this: the Self-Destruct Switch! If I press this tiny, tiny remote in my hand... BOOM! This little robot goes up in a massive explosion. Right in the middle of all those Happy Phantoms. Which means...?"

"Countdown ready?" Shinobu yelled. "Cutie Dolls, you count down with us too, okay?"

"10, 9, 8, 7, 6..." the dancers chanted.

"5, 4, 3, 2, 1..." Shinobu and Nanako joined in.

"Break out! Are you really, really ready!?"

"STOP IT!!"

A single voice pierced the parking lot.

"Tenchi!?" Ryoko, who had been looking for an opening near the stage, turned around.

The crowd of Happy Phantoms parted to let a young man in traditional work clothes through.

"Lord Tenchi!"

"Big Brother Tenchi!"

"Mos-Mos Syndicate! Stop this at once!"

"So you came, Tenchi... I've been waiting for you."

Amidst rising smoke and the swell of a full orchestra, Kagami rose up onto the stage, his face cold and sharp—a total transformation. "My father's enemy! Prince of Jurai, Tenchi. Today, I will defeat you!"

"Talk like a normal person, Kagami. I didn't come here to play games with you." Tenchi stopped at the foot of the stage and spoke in his usual calm voice. "Stop this. You're just being manipulated. Give me the switch."

Tenchi reached out his hand like he was asking a friend for something. Kagami didn't answer. Neither did the others.

"Lord Tenchi...?"

"Shh." Ryoko grabbed Ayeka's shoulder and shook her head, signaling her to be quiet.

"Hand it over, Kagami."

"Nanako-san... give me the switch." Kagami's expression twisted with pain.

"Wait, what? Seriously?"

"Tenchi. If you won't fight me, I'm turning this on." Kagami took the switch, his face returning to that cold mask, and raised one hand.

"Kagami!? ...You idiot!" Tenchi dashed onto the stage, trying to snatch the switch away.

"Fight me, Tenchi!!" Kagami shouted as he tossed the switch to Shinobu. "One on one! No one else interfere!"

A glowing blue lightsaber appeared in Kagami’s hand.

Chapter 13:
Tension on the Stage...

A suffocating tension hung over the stage. Kagami and Tenchi faced each other, each looking for an opening, shifting their weight in small, calculated movements.

"Come at me, Tenchi!" Kagami shifted the tip of his lightsaber slightly.

Tenchi, his own Light Hawk Sword lowered, almost lunged forward instinctively. *He’s good... he’s like a different person compared to when we first met*. Kagami was baiting him with openings that felt so natural Tenchi’s body reacted before his mind could.

"As you can see, I'm a complete amateur with a sword. A little practice shouldn't make me a match for you. Why are you hesitating, Tenchi? Are you saying I’m not even worth fighting?"

Tenchi remained silent, still conflicted. If he fought with the Light Hawk Sword and Kagami was this skilled, he couldn't use simple feints. He didn't know how Kagami had trained, but the boy now radiated a pressure similar to Kagato’s.

The way he focused on the hands while watching the whole body, the way he kept his body relaxed yet ready to react to the slightest change—these were things that usually took thousands of hours of training to master. Kagami was standing there in a perfectly natural stance. Only those who have undergone rigorous training can do that when facing a far superior opponent. It wasn't something a novice could just do.

Did Washu give him some kind of power? Tenchi wondered, but quickly dismissed it. Having trained since childhood, he could tell a person’s skill just by their stance. Kagami couldn't win, of course. Swordplay requires experience, and Kagami, who had never seen real combat, shouldn't be able to handle the Light Hawk Sword.

But... if they fought, Kagami would get hurt. He had completely abandoned his defense. The moment Kagami saw an opening, he would launch a desperate, all-out attack. Tenchi could tell he had the speed for it. Without knowing his

exact moves, Tenchi would have to rely on his own reflexes. If Kagami couldn't defend himself—and he likely couldn't—it wouldn't just be an injury. He might kill him.

"If you won't do it, then I'm coming to you." Kagami took a casual step forward, sword ready. "I must defeat you. I swore it to myself. I can't keep living while clutching my father's memory. I want to finally lay him to rest."

Step by step. The moment the words stopped, Kagami lunged with the speed of lightning. Tenchi's arm moved reflexively to parry. In that instant, the sword vanished from Kagami's hand—and reappeared as a horizontal line of blue light, a hair's breadth from Tenchi's throat. Just before Tenchi's blade could strike his, Kagami had switched hands and swung with everything he had.

"I... won..." Kagami whispered, his voice hoarse. "Did I win? I did, didn't I?"

The Light Hawk Sword vanished from Tenchi's hand. A massive wave of relief washed over him, drowning out the shock of defeat. Tenchi smiled. Deep down, he felt nothing but praise for Kagami.

"Yes, Kagami. You beat me."

"I... did it..." The blue blade of the lightsaber flickered out, and the hilt fell to the stage floor with a heavy thud. "Thank you, Tenchi."

Kagami closed his eyes and bowed his head. It was a move he had practiced hundreds, thousands of times. He had read the slight habits in Tenchi's form and struck at the perfect moment. A split second later, and he might have lost his life. He had bet everything on these three days for that one move.

Suddenly, the Happy Phantoms vanished. The giant robot disappeared too, replaced by a tiny tin toy—like something from an antique shop—rolling on the ground with a spent spring, before it too faded away.

The people who had been frozen throughout the battle began to move again, looking around in confusion. The stage, the banners, the M.O.S. logos—all gone. The girls of "Anywhere Dance MAX" were back in their normal clothes, looking like typical middle schoolers.

"Why did we come to City Hall again?"

"Beats me..." they muttered as they walked away.

"Why on earth are we here on a Sunday?"

"I'm not even on duty today. How strange..."

The city employees followed the girls out of the parking lot.

"I feel like something happened, but maybe it was a dream?"

"Nothing ever happens here."

"It’s a quiet town of burial mounds and shrines, after all."

"Maybe I got the date for next week's bazaar wrong..."

An elderly couple walked away, supporting each other. Within five minutes, the parking lot was empty, and the shopping district returned to its usual sleepy face.

Shinobu and Nanako stood where the stage had been, back in their regular clothes. Nanako wore her blue mini-dress and boots, and Shinobu was in a sweatshirt and Nike sneakers.

"Everything’s gone!" Nanako shouted with a mix of laughter and tears.

"What was that all about!? Were we really just dreaming!?" Shinobu hugged her, dazed.

"Kagami-chan! Why didn't *you* disappear!? And you too, Tenchi-kun!"

"I don't really know what to tell you..." Tenchi smiled awkwardly.

"Haaaaaa..." Ayeka, Sasami, Mihoshi, and Kiyone all slumped down as if the air had been let out of them.

"What in the world was all that chaos about?"

Nanako and the others were back to normal, but Ayeka and her group were still wearing their Pri-Pri Cutie Doll dresses.

"Why are you the only ones still wearing those ridiculous outfits!?"

"Hey, watch it with the 'ridiculous'!" Ryoko floated up and crossed her legs in mid-air. "Since Washu wouldn't help, I had to ask Tenchi's aunt to make them!"

"Oh, is that so? I thought the craftsmanship was surprisingly good."

From behind the only car left in the parking lot, Washu appeared, still wearing her black cloak.

"There she is! The monster!!" Nanako pointed and yelled. "What did you do to our world conquest!?"

"Didn't you already conquer every corner of this place?" Washu smiled back. "The primary lesson is over. The rest is up to you. Look, there are still a few people left who weren't affected, right?"

"What a terrible fortune teller! If I were the police, I'd arrest you for fraud. Right, Shinobu?"

"If I were a monkey, I'd have scratched her by now," Shinobu glared at Washu. "But since I'm a smart human, I'll let it slide."

"Ahaha! You're the best!" Nanako laughed and pulled Shinobu in. "I'm going to kiss you."

"Aw, must be nice..."

Watching Nanako and Shinobu share a passionate kiss in public, Sasami nudged Ayeka. "You want to do that too, don't you, Sister?"

"Of course I do!" Ayeka shouted back, then turned beet red to her ears. "No! I mean, I don't! That was a lie!"

"That's nice..." Kagami blushed and looked away, only to lock eyes with Ayeka. "Um... may I ask your name?"

Kagami turned even redder and looked at the ground. "Come to think of it, I never even asked any of your names."

"Um... I am Ayeka," she said, standing up. "The first princess of the Royal House of Jurai. This is my sister, Sasami."

"I'm Mihoshi from the Galaxy Police!"

"And I'm Kiyone, also from the Galaxy Police."

"I'm Shinobu Tomori. This is Nanako Sewa."

"WE KNOW!!" Ayeka and the others shouted in unison.

"We've been reading about you in magazines every day!"

"What? So you guys were our groupies?"

"Groupies!? How rude! Please call it 'investigative activity'."

"Hey, hey, what's the deal with Washu? How do you know her?"

Nanako and the girls from the Masaki house immediately began swapping stories.

"They were enemies just a minute ago," Tenchi noted.

"Indeed..."

Tenchi and Kagami naturally drifted toward each other and began to talk.

"Tenchi-san... I think I'll stay on this planet for a little while longer." Kagami looked around at the green trees and narrowed his eyes. "Earth is a beautiful planet. I lived on a world with nothing but deserts and minerals. I used to play the piano in a bar near the spaceport."

"The piano?"

"Yes... I thought I'd never play it again." Kagami looked off into the distance. He realized the thing he never wanted to hold again was a lightsaber. He felt like he could make it here. He would discard the old songs of grief and put his new-found feelings into a melody. Just as a new piece of music gradually becomes familiar to the fingers, he wanted to "play" this planet.

"Tenchi-san, are there bars in this town? I'll need to find a place to live. I can't keep relying on Nanako and the others forever."

"Kagami..." Tenchi almost invited him to live at his house, but caught himself. "Yeah. I'm sure you'll find something. My house is full of aliens anyway, so feel free to come over and hang out anytime."

"I will," Kagami smiled. "I think my father would approve."

Deep in his heart, he felt like the memory of his father was finally smiling back.

Epilogue

Six months later...

The seasons had turned, and the smile of the spring sun shone down. A small church chapel was packed with well-wishers, the air buzzing with a strange, frantic energy. Everyone was waiting with bated breath for the arrival of the day's guests of honor.

"I wonder what's happened to those two?" Nobuyuki murmured worriedly, adjusting his formal suit. "Surely they aren't still asleep...?"

Nobuyuki had the heavy responsibility of escorting the bride today. Since the bride came from a single-parent household, he had volunteered to step in as the father figure.

"Knowing those two..." Ayeka murmured, dressed in the formal regalia of the Jurai Royal House.

"It's entirely possible!" Ryoko added. She was wearing a rule-breaking white long-tight dress, but since it was Ryoko, no one dared to complain.

"The ceremony can't start without the bride..." Sasami was also in Jurai royal attire, but because Ryo-Ohki was perched on her head, her magnificent outfit looked more like a costume.

"I bet they both thought the other person set the alarm, but neither of them actually did," Mihoshi whispered, looking like a yellow canola flower in her bright dress.

"No way. Not on a day as important as this..." Kiyone, in a citrus-green suit, looked exactly like the leaves of a canola flower standing next to Mihoshi. As usual, she was serving as Mihoshi's visual foil.

"Should I go check one more time?" Tenchi, who had already checked moments ago, peered toward the entrance.

"That would be wise. The priest is waiting as well," Katsuhito nodded grandly, dressed in a traditional crested *hakama*.

At that very moment, Nanako and Shinobu were in the middle of their third argument inside a taxi.

"That’s why I asked you over and over—did you set the alarm!?"

"And you were the one who said, 'I set it, so it's fine'!"

"Excuse me, folks, is this for a wedding? The hosts must be quite troubled if the stars of the show aren't there yet," the taxi driver said, glancing into the rearview mirror with an exasperated look.

The man in the white tuxedo had his long hair tied back in a ponytail, while the woman in the wedding dress was staring into her compact, preoccupied with final touch-ups.

"Whoops... roadwork ahead." The taxi came to a sudden halt. "If we can't go through here... we'll have to pull a U-turn and go the long way around."

"What? You've got to be kidding me!"

"Wait a second." Nanako frowned, glaring at the road closure sign. The church was just up the hill from here. "Shinobu, get out! Driver, this is fine."

"Wha—!? You're planning to run up this hill?"

"Shut up! People run marathons; we can handle a hill!"

Nanako and Shinobu hopped out of the taxi and started jogging. However, before they had even gone ten steps, a pure white convertible appeared. Sitting in the driver's seat was a petite woman in a black gown, looking like a university professor.

"Hey there, young man, young lady. I'll give you a lift to the church." The 'professor' shook her red 'crab-leg' hair and smiled brilliantly.

"There she is again! The Mysterious Crab Alien!" Nanako glared at her. "I appreciate the offer, but we’ll use our own feet, thanks! I don't want to get to the church only for everything to vanish, realizing I'm still tucked in bed!"

"So cynical," Washu muttered, watching the dramatic pair sprint desperately up the hill. "Well, whatever. This car started out as a display piece in front of a toy store anyway."

Instead of shifting gears, Washu tapped a button on the panel. The convertible began to drive itself, overtaking the two protagonists halfway up the slope and coming to an elegant stop in front of the church.

"Shinobu Tomori, do you vow to love this woman for the rest of your life, in sickness and in health?"

"I do."

"Nanako Sewa, do you vow to love this man for the rest of your life, in sickness and in health?"

"I do."

"Then, exchange the rings."

Shinobu slipped a small diamond ring onto Nanako’s finger.

"What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." The priest nodded, looking relieved.

"Let’s go, Shinobu."

"Ready when you are, Nanako."

Nanako flipped back her veil, wrapped her arms around Shinobu’s neck, and gave him a kiss so full of "guts" it would have made the Son of God on the crucifix blush.

"Nanako-san is so beautiful..." Sasami gazed dreamily at Nanako's high-fashion wedding dress.

Nanako usually went for a "mod" look, but today she chose a classic Givenchy-style plain dress with a long train. Granted, Shinobu’s tied-back hair had a blue accent color that looked like tinted somen noodles, and Nanako had a "Cupid sticking out his tongue" temporary tattoo visible through the lace on her shoulder, which was very "them."

"Well, they *did* conquer the world once," Washu murmured with satisfaction.

Unknown to anyone, Washu actually loved weddings. She liked the way they felt like an endless shower of boundless happy energy. However, since it didn't look like any of the Masaki household residents were getting married anytime soon, she found it somewhat regrettable.

"Kagami-san didn't come after all..." Sasami tugged on Washu’s sleeve. "They say no one knows where he is right now?"

"The rumor is he's become a wandering pianist, traveling from place to place," Kiyone whispered softly. "If Kagami-san were here, the jigsaw puzzle would be complete."

Suddenly, the piano in the corner of the chapel began to play on its own. It was an orthodox Wedding March.

"Eh!?" Shinobu and Nanako looked at each other.

The Wedding March transitioned into Liszt's *Liebestraum No. 3*, and as it reached the development section, the melody shifted. It was a mysterious harmony unlike anything heard on this planet, sounding as though it were studded with the stars of the galaxy.

"Could it be... Kagami-chan...!?"

Then, the figure of a beautiful young man with long silver hair flowing down his back appeared at the piano. He appeared, quite literally, like magic.

"Kagami!?"

"I'm sorry I'm late. Shinobu-san, Nanako-san... congratulations on your marriage." Kagami looked back briefly, then turned back to the piano and began to play a new song of love.

It was a melody no one on Earth had ever heard. Yet, it was nostalgic, warm, and felt like being wrapped in the spring sunshine. Light was born from Kagami’s fingertips, flowers bloomed, and the sparkle of sunlight filtering through trees colored the chapel. It was as if he had carefully collected all the beautiful things on this Earth and gently opened the box.

"Kagami-chan!! Why didn't you say something!?" The bride and groom ran down the virgin road and ambushed the silver-haired youth from behind.

"Ah, Nanako-san... just a little bit more..." Kagami’s right arm was pinned, so he was forced to finish the piece with his left hand.

"You're gonna play for us until your fingers wear out later!" Shinobu grabbed Kagami’s left arm and pulled him up from the bench. "We have to have all three of us together!"

"World conquest is a bust without our leader!" Nanako cried.

Hugged from both sides by Shinobu and Nanako, Kagami turned red as a tomato. "Ah... you two... am I not in the way?"

"Long live M.O.S.!" "The Mos-Mos Syndicate is GREAT!!"

The former "groupies" from the Masaki house exchanged glances and cheered in unison.

"I cannot have you saying you conquered the world with just that."

A vibrant, deep voice echoed through the chapel, and a tall man appeared, his silver hair tied back, wearing a deep green cloak.

"Kagami! You failure. What on earth are you doing in a place like this?"

"Kagato!?" Tenchi stood up instinctively.

"Professor!!" Kagami stood frozen in shock. "How... I thought you died back then..."

"You thought I had died?" Kagato looked down at his son with quiet golden eyes. "You understand nothing. However, I shall praise your skill at the piano. You have trained well."

A flash of amusement danced in Kagato's eyes. "Come. I am taking that photograph in your heart with me."

Kagato drew his son close, cupped his cheeks with both hands, and ran his fingers through his silver hair. "Your sound is what awakened me. You've grown, Kagami."

Kagato gave a faint smile, then filled the chapel with a brilliant light for a moment before vanishing. By the time Kagami ran forward, his father was nowhere to be found.

"Washu-san, surely you didn't..."

"No, it wasn't me. That was the genuine, real Kagato just now," Washu whispered back to a stunned Tenchi. "A father indeed... coming all the way from a higher dimension..."

Kagami remained standing there, dazed. "Professor..."

Tears spilled from golden eyes much like his father's, tracing down his cheeks. Like the illusion Nanako had seen when they first met, the crystal-like tears fell and created a tiny rainbow in the sanctuary.

"Please watch over me. I will live my life on this planet."

Kagami searched his heart. The photograph of his father was gone, but in its place, a tiny, newborn star was shining brightly.

[FIN]

Afterword

Thank you for waiting, and it’s been a while. I finally bring you the seventh "Tenchi" book. I see you constantly in the monthly magazine, but it’s been a while for a full book, hasn't it?

Now, about this title, *World Conquest Even a Monkey Can Do*. I believe I thought of it around early spring. *Yes, this is it! If I don't write this, I'm no author!* Even though the content was nonexistent at the time, I was getting excited all by myself. I'm the type who thinks of the title first. That’s why at the start, I was like, "Oh no, I have the title but the story is lost in the mist!?"

Calling the characters out of that mist, gathering the props and sets, giving them a script, and saying "Action!" takes quite a bit of time. Of course, it’s the director’s fault for running off on a whim without thinking, and this time was exactly like that—it took a fair amount of time to reach "wrap" (though the actual writing period wasn't that long).

Now, back to world conquest. In the world of tokusatsu, old robot shows, and hero shows, the monsters, leaders, and generals shout about world conquest over and over, only to get thrashed by the heroes. It’s so "persistent" that it feels like the plans were made specifically to fail; everyone knows where the secret base is, and the hero always sniffs out the plot. I wondered: what is this "World Conquest" that is so unrewarding despite all the hard work?

If I was going to do it, I wanted it to be casual and low-key. A stylish and cute world conquest. Loved by grandmas, grandpas, moms, and dads. The kind of thing where it feels silly to even try to stop it. And then there's Tenchi-kun, who feels more like a professional carrot farmer these days than a Prince of Light; he naturally worries. "Can I really let this irrational situation slide!?"

Well, there may be pros and cons regarding the content of this world conquest, but another thing I was thinking about this time was "The Masaki family members out in society." Despite going to space, other worlds, and different dimensions, they hadn't even stepped foot into the next train station until now. Finally, the Masaki residents are interacting with the world. Their life on Earth has become settled, and they're at that age where they're getting a bit bored. Like chicks peeking out of the nest, they want to see the wide world, and if they make friends, it’s a lucky bonus. It’s the moment the Masaki household—which was closed tight like a barrier—opens up to feel the world's breeze. (Though, granted, it is still protected by an even larger barrier...)

Now for the new character, Kagami-kun. Look, kid, you're blessed with those looks and you're great at the piano—what are you worrying so much for? Just because you're Kagato's son? No one on Earth knows that, so your best bet is to just make a pro debut in music! At least, that's what I think.

The "monkey duo" Shinobu and Nanako were the most fun to write this time. During my own youth, which was at that same age, things were a bit darker, so I wrote them thinking, "I wish my days could have been this fun." Nowadays, my evenings consist of being raided by elementary schoolers who descend like hungry vultures along with my daughter and empty out the rice cooker. Man, growing kids and curry are an inseparable pair, aren't they? This summer, I feel like I did nothing but make curry. Curry at camp, curry after the pool, curry for the kids' club... There's a brief scene in this story where George-san makes curry for lunch, and behind the scenes, that's just the author's real-life experience... hey, Hasegawa, get back to work!

Having dedicated most of the summer to world conquest yet again, I cycle through the park and think: *Ah, the cicadas are still buzzing! I'm still in time! My summer is just beginning!* I missed the sales and failed to buy a new swimsuit, but I'll probably spend a slightly late summer vacation around Hachijojima. By the time this book is out, I expect I'll already be on my next job.

In the pages of *Dragon Magazine*, "Tenchi" is handing the baton over to "Pretty Sammy" for a bit. (Good luck, Kuroda-san!) I feel like the Masaki household is eternally immortal these days, so I think I'll be seeing you again next time. It seems like the day wedding bells ring for certain people is in the very distant future, but the residents of the Masaki house will be spending their eternal "long vacation" in high spirits today as well!

I dedicate this story to all the Shinobus and Nanakos out there who have no money but are full of love and courage, and to all the singles who hold dreams of world conquest. I hope that one day, you'll be able to tell your children about these heart-pounding adventures, saying, "Your father and mother, back in the day..."

While organizing the mountain of books I bought but haven't read yet.

Naoko Hasegawa